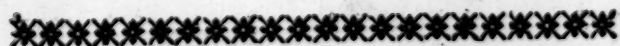




A N
E S S A Y
O N
M I R A C L E S.



[Price Two SHILLINGS.]



A N
E S S A Y
In ANSWER to
Mr. *HUME*'s ESSAY
O N
M I R A C L E S.

By WILLIAM ADAMS, D.D.
MASTER of PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD.

The FOURTH EDITION, with Additions.

——— *it fumus ad auras.* VIRO.

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A N

ESSAY, &c.

***** R. HUME hath many of the ta-
* M * lents of a fine writer, and hath
* * * justly obtained that character by
***** the agreeable *Essays moral and po-
litical* *, with which he has obliged the
world. What he hath written well will cre-
ate a prejudice in favour of his errors; and
these will have all their bad influence, when
recommended by so able an advocate. The
present is a subject of the greatest impor-
tance, and the author expresses a particular
satisfaction in his performance. These are
reasons for considering it carefully, and for
B guarding

* The reader is desired to distinguish betwixt this and
the *Philosophical Essays* of this author, which is the book
referred to throughout this treatise.

guarding ourselves against being deceived by the artifice or eloquence of the writer.

He begins with challenging, a little indirectly, the thanks of the public, for a discovery, which, he apprehends, will be of universal service to mankind. This is nothing less than an infallible cure for superstition. "I flatter myself," says he, "that I have discovered an argument, which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and, consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures; for so long, I suppose, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all profane history*." The virtues of this specifick are such, that it exterminates all religions alike; as he shews, by trying its strength upon the *Christian*, which, where it prevails, is, perhaps, more obstinate and hard of cure than any other. Here, however, it has been known to fail. I have given it a fair trial, and known it tried by others, without the least effect, and think I can prove that there is no one ingredient of any virtue or efficacy in it.

The

* *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, p. 174, first edition, page 344 of the 4to Edit. 1758.

The secret itself is contained in the compass of a few lines: and therefore, to give some port and figure to it, the author has thought necessary to introduce it with some preliminary observations.

In the first of these, his meaning seems to be to lay down this as a principle — that all our reasonings concerning matter of fact are founded wholly on experience: “Tho’ experience be our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact, it must be acknowledged, that this guide is not altogether infallible, but in some cases is apt to lead us into errors and mistakes. One, who in our climate should expect better weather in any week of *June* than in one of *December*, would reason justly and conformable to experience; but ’tis certain, that he may happen in the event to find himself mistaken. However, we may observe, that in such a case he would have no cause to complain of experience; because it commonly informs us before-hand of the uncertainty, by that contrariety of events which we may learn from a diligent observation *.” In illustrating this

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* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 174.

observation, both here and elsewhere, he seems to confine it to such events as are future : “ An hundred instances or experiments on one side, and fifty on another, “ afford a very doubtful expectation of any “ event ; tho’ an hundred uniform experiments, with only one contradictory one, “ do reasonably beget a very strong degree “ of assurance †.” Here then I readily allow, that in reasoning concerning future contingencies experience is the best guide we have, tho’ in many cases, as will hereafter be seen, a very uncertain one.

This observation is followed by a prudent caution. “ A wise man,” he tells us, “ proportions his belief to the evidence. “ In such conclusions as are founded on an “ infallible experience he expects the event “ with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a full proof “ of the future existence of that event. In “ other cases he proceeds with more caution : he weighs the opposite experiments ; “ he considers which side is supported by “ the greatest number of experiments ; to “ that side he inclines, with doubt and hesitation ; and, when at last he fixes his “ judgment, the evidence exceeds not what “ we

“ we properly call probability. — In all cases we must balance the opposite experiments, where they are opposite, and deduct the lesser number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence *.” This logick is very just, and what, I am persuaded, every man of the plainest understanding knows how to practise, without learning it from the schools, or from the author’s refinements on the *curious and sublime subject* (as he calls it) of probability †.

He then proceeds — “ To apply these principles to a particular instance : We may observe, there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators. This species of reasoning perhaps one may deny to be founded on the relation of cause and effect. I shall not dispute about a word. ’Twill be sufficient to observe, that our assurance, in any argument of this kind, is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity

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“ mity

* P. 175.

† *Essay on Probability*, p. 97.

“ mity of facts to the report of witnesses*.”
 ’Tis difficult to say what the author would here exemplify, there being no clear connection between this and the preceding paragraphs. But, if I may presume to explain it, his argument stands thus : The principle he set out with, was, that our reasoning about matters of fact depends wholly upon experience. This he hath proved concerning such events as are future : he now wants to prove the same concerning facts that are past. Here he is aware, that besides experience, we have another guide, which is the testimony of history, that of witnesses, &c. These he does not chuse to distinguish from the former, but insinuates, that the evidence of testimony is included in that of experience, or that every argument from testimony is only an argument from experience, for as much as the truth of that depends ultimately upon this †. “ The ultimate standard,”

* *Philosoph. Essays*, p. 176.

† It may with more propriety be said, that the evidence of experience is included in that of testimony, than the contrary. Our own experience reaches around and goes back but a little way. But the experience of others, upon which we chiefly depend, is derived to us wholly from history and tradition, that is, from testimony. And it is obvious to observe, that, in a question of fact, the testimony of negative witnesses how many soever, is, for the most part

ard," he tells us below, " by which we determine disputes of this kind, is always " derived from experience and observation." Now it is true, that the evidence of testimony must be resolved at last into experience: but this experience is of a species entirely distinct from that on which the natural probability of any fact attested rests: nor does it consist, as this author asserts, in our *observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts with the reports of witnesses*. It is built upon other principles, to which the author himself leads us in the words that follow: " Did " not men's imagination naturally follow " their memory — had they not commonly " an inclination to truth, and a sentiment " of probity — were they not sensible to " shame, when detected in a falsehood — " Were not these, I say, discovered by experience to be qualities inherent in human " nature, we should never repose the least " confidence in human testimony *." The first of these motives I do not understand. Of the rest I shall observe, that their force we collect, not so much from our observa-

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tion

part, no evidence at all; while positive testimony must, more or less, have its weight.

* P. 177.

tion of other men, as from our own feeling, and a consciousness of what passes within our own breast. We perceive in ourselves, that a love and reverence for truth is natural to the mind of man : and the same self-experience teaches us, that there are certain other principles in human nature, by which the veracity of men may be tried, and the truth of testimony be often put out of doubt, as will be hereafter seen.

The next observation is, that, “ as the
 “ evidence derived from witnesses and hu-
 “ man testimony is founded on past experi-
 “ ence, so it varies with the experience, and
 “ is regarded either as a proof or probabi-
 “ lity, according as the conjunction betwixt
 “ any particular kind of report and any
 “ kind of objects has been found to be con-
 “ stant or variable †.” Here again the au-
 thor’s meaning is lost in a thicket of words,
 which it is difficult for a common eye to
 penetrate. Let the reader try what he can
 make of the *conjunction varying betwixt any
 particular report and any kind of objects*. The
 credibility of an historical fact depends up-
 on the credibility of the fact itself, and that
 of the historian or witnesses who relate it.

These

These should be always considered distinctly; tho' the author, for reasons of his own, chuses to confound them. The latter of these depends in part upon principles that are fixed and invariable, such as those the author has just mentioned, which are general principles of human nature; and in part too on the personal character of the relator, the interest he has in the fact related, and other circumstances. As these circumstances vary, the evidence varies, and the fact becomes more or less credible. And so, concerning the natural credibility of the fact, this is greater or less, according as our own, and the observation of others, in cases of a similar nature, has been more or less uniform. Something like this I take to be the author's meaning in this place: and this is the amount of all that follows in this and the next paragraph. My design, therefore, in this remark, is, not to contest the author's principles, which, as far as I understand them, are right enough; but to shew that his style and manner of writing tend to embarrass the subject, and perplex the reader.

We are now coming nearer to the matter in question. "Suppose," says the author,
 "that

“ that the fact, which the testimony endea-
 “ vours to establish, partakes of the extra-
 “ ordinary and the marvellous ; in that case,
 “ the evidence resulting from the testimony
 “ receives a diminution, greater or less, in
 “ proportion as the fact is more or less unu-
 “ sual. — When the fact attested is such a
 “ one as has seldom fallen under our obser-
 “ vation, here is a contest of two opposite
 “ experiences ; of which the one destroys
 “ the other, as far as its force goes, and the
 “ superior can only operate on the mind by
 “ the force which remains. The very same
 “ principle of experience, which gives us a
 “ certain degree of assurance in the testimo-
 “ ny of witnesses, gives us also, in this case,
 “ another degree of assurance against the
 “ fact which they endeavour to establish *.”

Here the author seems to suppose, that a
 want of experience, in any case, is the same
 with experiencing the contrary. *When a fact
 attested hath seldom fallen under our observa-
 tion, “ here is,”* says he, *“ a contest of two
 “ opposite experiences :”* but, in reality, here
 is no experience at all ; only a fact not
 observed on one side, and positive evidence,
 or the fact attested, on the other — a very
 unequal contest ! as we shall presently see ;
 the

the slightest positive testimony being, for the most part, an over-balance to the strongest negative evidence that can be produced. I grant, however, all that the author's argument requires, *viz.* that experience teaches us, of many things, that they are improbable, and not to be hastily believed; of others, that they are naturally incredible: but these are so, not because they are unusual or unobserved, but because there is a known disproportion betwixt the cause assigned and the effect, or because the fact asserted is a contradiction to some known and universal truth.

These premises he now draws to a point, and makes them center in one conclusive argument against miracles: "To increase
 " the probability against the testimony of
 " witnesses, let us suppose, that the fact
 " which they affirm, instead of being only
 " marvellous, is really miraculous; and
 " suppose also, that the testimony, considered apart and in itself, amounts to an
 " entire proof: in that case, there is proof
 " against proof, of which the strongest
 " must prevail, but still with a diminution
 " of its force in proportion to that of its
 " antagonist *." I have just allowed, that
 there

there are facts which experience assures us are wholly incredible: but of these I shall assert, that no good testimony can be produced in their favour. Truth is always consistent with itself; and no one truth can ever be contradicted by another. The author is, therefore, too kind in supposing that miracles may admit of full proof from testimony. I shall take no advantage of this concession, but readily acknowledge, that, if they are proved *à priori* to be incredible, it will be a vain attempt to prove them by testimony. Let us see, then, what the author alledges in bar of this proof, His batteries are now mounted, and he begins the attack.

“ A miracle,” says he, “ is a violation
 “ of the laws of nature; and, as a firm
 “ and unalterable experience hath estab-
 “ lished these laws, the proof against a mi-
 “ racle, from the nature of the fact, is
 “ as entire as any argument from experi-
 “ ence can possibly be imagined. Why is
 “ it more than probable, that all men must
 “ die—that lead cannot by itself remain
 “ suspended in the air—that fire consumes
 “ wood, and is extinguished by water—un-
 “ less

“ less it be, that these events are found
 “ agreeable to the laws of nature, and
 “ there is required a violation of these laws,
 “ or, in other words, a miracle, to prevent
 “ them? Nothing is esteemed a miracle,
 “ if it ever happens in the common course
 “ of nature. ’Tis no miracle, that a man
 “ in seeming good health should die of a
 “ sudden; because such a kind of death, tho’
 “ more unusual than any other, has yet
 “ been frequently observed to happen: but
 “ ’tis a miracle, that a dead man should
 “ come to life; because that hath never been
 “ observed in any age or country. There
 “ must, therefore, be an uniform experi-
 “ ence against every miraculous event, o-
 “ therwise the event would not merit the
 “ appellation. And, as an uniform ex-
 “ perience amounts to a proof, there is
 “ here a direct and full proof, from the
 “ nature of the fact, against the existence
 “ of any miracle: nor can such a proof
 “ be destroyed, or the miracle render’d cre-
 “ dible, but by an opposite proof that is
 “ superior *.”

I have endeavoured to preserve the
 strength of this argument entire, by col-
 lecting

lecting every thing that is of any import to it in the observations that precede it: and, that the reader may see it in its strongest light, I shall here repeat it, as it is again summed up by the author at the end of his Essay :

“ It appears, that no testimony for any
 “ kind of miracle can ever amount to a
 “ probability, much less to a proof; and
 “ that, even supposing it amounted to a
 “ proof, ’twould be opposed by another
 “ proof, derived from the very nature of the
 “ fact which it would endeavour to establish.
 “ ’Tis experience alone which gives
 “ authority to human testimony; and ’tis
 “ the same experience which assures us of
 “ the laws of nature. When, therefore,
 “ these two kinds of experience are contrary,
 “ we have nothing to do but subtract
 “ the one from the other, and embrace an
 “ opinion, either on the one side or the other,
 “ with that assurance which arises from
 “ the remainder. But, according to the
 “ principle here explained, this subtraction,
 “ with regard to all popular religions, amounts
 “ to an entire annihilation: and
 “ therefore we may establish it as a maxim,
 “ that no human testimony can have such
 “ force

“ force as to prove a miracle, and make it
 “ a just foundation for any such system of
 “ religion *.”

This is the author's great discovery. The whole secret is out. And here one cannot but wonder to see a position, which is laid down by all that write in defence of miracles, pleaded as a decisive argument against them, and to find the experience of all mankind brought in evidence against all the religions of the world. An experienced uniformity in the course of nature hath been always thought necessary to the belief and use of miracles. These are indeed relative ideas. There must be an ordinary regular course of nature, before there can be any thing extraordinary. A river must flow, before it's stream can be interrupted. It is strange, therefore, that this uniformity, which is implied in the nature of a miracle, should at the same time be inconsistent with it. This is to suppose, that the existence of a miracle is a contradiction in terms ; and as such indeed the author seems to treat it :
 “ A miracle supported by any human testi-
 “ mony is more properly a subject of derisi-
 “ on

“on than of argument * :” And again,
 “What have we to oppose to such a cloud of
 “witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or
 “miraculous nature of events † ?” A mo-
 dest reader can scarce look such assurance as
 this in the face : he will be apt to mistrust
 his own apprehension, and think there is
 more in these big words than he readily sees.
 The first reading gave me suspicions of this
 kind ; but, having recovered myself, and
 taken courage to review it, I fear not to as-
 sert, that all the experience the author can
 bring will amount to neither proof nor ar-
 gument against the belief of miracles. Let
 him, if he pleases, plead his own experience
 — that he has never seen or been witness to
 any miracle — that he has always found the
 course of nature to be the same and un-
 changed : but does this experience teach
 him, that the laws of nature are necessary
 and immutable — that there is no power in
 being sufficient to suspend or alter them —
 or that there can be no reasons to induce
 such a power to act ? ’Till one or other of
 these can be proved from experience, it is no
 evidence in the present case, and instead of
 deciding the matter in question, is wholly
 impertinent and foreign to it. Can the
 southern

* P. 194.

† P. 195.

southern climates experience that there is no frost in the north? Or, can Mr. *Hume* experience that I have never seen fire kindled by a touch from ice? This negative evidence, tho' multiplied infinitely, would still be negative: and the fact last mentioned might be true, and capable of very easy proof from testimony, as I shall presently shew, though all the world should agree that they had never seen the like.

The uniformity of nature is no way impeached or brought in question by the supposition of miracles. The concurring testimony of mankind to the course of nature is not contradicted by those who have experienced contrary appearances in a few instances. The idea of a miracle unites and reconciles these seeming differences. By supposing the facts in question to be miraculous, the uniformity of nature is preserved, and the facts are accounted for upon another principle entirely consistent with it. Thus, experience teaches us that lead and iron are heavier than water: but a man, by projecting these heavy bodies, may make them swim in water, or fly in air. Should the same be done by any invisible power, it would be a miracle. But the uniformity of

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nature

nature is no more disturbed in this case than the former : nor is the general experience, which witnesses to the superior gravity of these bodies, any proof that they may not be raised in air and water by some invisible agent, as well as by the power of man. All that experience teaches is the comparative weight of these bodies. If, therefore, they are seen to float in mediums lighter than themselves, this must be the effect of art or strength : but, if it be done without any visible art or power, it must be done then by some art or power that is invisible ; that is, it must be miraculous. This is the process by which we infer the existence of miracles ; which is, therefore, so far from being contradicted by that experience upon which the laws of nature are established, that it is closely connected and stands in the fairest agreement with it.

The question then will remain—Whether any such invisible agents have ever interposed in producing visible effects ? Against the *possibility* of this, tho' the author is pleased to pronounce it impossible, he hath offered no argument (and, indeed, none can possibly be offered) : Against the *credibility* of it, the experience which he pleads is no argument
at

at all. This experience proves a course of nature ; but, whether this is ever interrupted, is still a question. This experience teaches what may be ordinarily expected from common causes, and in the common course of things : but miraculous interpositions, which we are enquiring after, are, by their nature and essence, extraordinary and out of the common course of nature. Miracles, if at all, are effects of an extraordinary power upon extraordinary occasions : consequently, common experience can determine nothing concerning them. That such occasions may arise, both in the natural and moral world, is easy to conceive. The greatest of natural philosophers * hath thought, that the frame of the world will want, in a course of time, the hand that made to retouch and refit it. The greatest of moral philosophers † hath thought it a reasonable hope, that God would some time send a messenger from heaven to instruct men in the great duties of religion and morality.

As to the question of *fact*—Whether any such interpositions have been ever known or observed ? this must be tried, like all other historical facts, by the testimony of those

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who

* *Newton Opt.* Ed. Lat. p. 346.

† *Socrates in Platonis Alcibiade* 2^o, sub finem.

who relate it, and the credit of the first witnesses who have vouched it; and not, as this author would have it, by the testimony of others — of those who lived in distant times and places. There is mention of a comet, a little before the *Achaian* war, which appeared as big as the sun *. If this were well attested by the astronomers of that time, it would be trifling to object against it that the like had never been observed before or since. And just as pertinent is it to allege the experience of ages and countries against miracles which are said to be wrought in other times and other countries.

But, in truth, were the world to give evidence in the present question, they would, I am persuaded, depose very differently from what this author expects. A great part of mankind have given their testimony to the credibility of miracles: they have actually believed them. By this author's account, all the religions in the world have been founded upon this belief. If this be true, we have universal testimony to the credibility of miracles. How then can there be uni-

* *Seneca Nat. Quaest.* lib. 7. cap. 15. This I suppose to be the Comet which Dr. *John Keil*, in his *Astronomical Lectures*, mentions as appearing in the time of *Nero*.

universal experience against them? The author tells us, that we must judge of testimony by experience. It is more certain that we must judge of the experience of men by their testimony.

It is far from true that all religions have been founded on miracles. None but the *Christian* and *Jewish* appear to be so founded. But there is a sort of miracles, which men of all religions have agreed in believing. "A miracle," as this author says, "may be either discoverable by men, or not. 'This alters not its nature and essence*.'" Many things appear to us to be effected by natural means, the first springs of which may be moved by the immediate hand of God. But every such interposition, in overruling or giving a new direction to the course of nature, is, as the author allows, miraculous. If then Providence ever interposes in punishing exemplary wickedness, or in the support of eminent virtue — in averting evil, or bestowing good — these are miracles. But these have been universally believed. These blessings of heaven have been implored and acknowledged, and these judgments deprecated, in the publick and pri-

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vate

* P. 181.

vate prayers of mankind, from the beginning of the world to this time.

We cannot indeed argue, from these supposed interpositions, that therefore Providence will interpose in a visible and sensible manner. But it follows, that such interpositions are possible; it follows, that they are credible. If we believe these miraculous interpositions, when they do not appear to our senses, what should hinder us from believing the like upon the report of our senses, or of credible persons who give witness to them? If there are general reasons for concealing these interpositions, may there not too be special reasons for signaling them at times to the senses and notice of mankind? It is certain, that, if any such reasons can be assigned, all that is difficult of belief in miracles will be removed. Now, tho' we cannot indeed look into the counsels of Providence, nor, without presumption, pronounce what is fit for God, in any supposed circumstance, to do; yet, in judging of past facts or miracles that are questioned, we can readily see whether any great end, worthy of God, hath been answered by them: and if this appear to be the case, it will create a presumption in

in their favour: and if, farther, it shall seem that this end could not have been compassed by any other means, this will amount to some proof of their reality.

To see this matter in the clearest light, it may be proper to consider more distinctly the grounds of that credibility, which we allow, in different degrees, to historical facts. This depends, as I have said, on the credibility of the facts themselves, and on that of the historian or witnesses who relate them.

The credibility of any fact in itself, as this author frequently tells us, depends upon its analogy with the known course of nature *. But the powers of nature are so imperfectly known to us, that in most cases we argue with great uncertainty from this principle. A consequence of this is, that testimony is, for the most part, of much greater force to establish the truth of past facts, than experience. It would have been thought highly incredible a few years ago, that an animal might be propagated by cutting it in pieces — that you might, by dividing one living creature, give life to an hundred of the same species. Yet this sort

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of

* P. 165.

of *Hydra* has been discovered; and the fact, tho' contrary to the whole analogy of nature, was readily believed, when it had been experienced and testified by very few. In like manner, I have no doubt that the magnet loses its polarity in very cold latitudes. I believe this upon the testimony of one man *, tho' the experience of travellers in all climates before attests the contrary. Here the most uniform experience is outweighed by a single evidence. The reason is, that the experience of other countries is only a negative evidence in the question. The experience was indeed, before the fact was tried, a very strong presumption against it. The most cautious sailor would have ventured his fortune and life upon it. Yet is this presumption of no weight in the question of past fact, when compared with the slightest testimony †.

In

• Mr. *Ellis*, in his account of the North-west Passage.

† Every proposition or fact asserted is *certainly* true or false. By credible or probable we mean, not any thing real in the character of the proposition or fact, but only its appearance to us, or to the person who estimates this credibility. A thing is said to be credible, when it wants and is thought capable of proof — to be probable, when there appear more reasons for than against believing it. *Credible* is more than *possible*, and *impossible* more than *incredible*. Again,

In cases where a sufficient cause is assigned, an effect, however new and strange, may become credible, or even probable, in itself, without any testimony to support it. That fire should be kindled by a touch from ice, is contrary to the experience of some thousand years. But electricity is a cause given equal to the effect. From this time then the fact becomes credible, and even probable, tho' it were not tried and proved by any one witness.

In moral or intelligent agents we look for moral causes—for reasons or motives to induce them to act, as well as for the natural powers of acting. And, where both a final and efficient cause appear equal to the effect, the effect, however strange in itself, will become credible by testimony, if not probable
without

gain, *probable* is more than *credible*, and *incredible* is more than *improbable*. But these words are used in common language somewhat promiscuously. Thus, what is highly probable is said to be highly credible, and what is very improbable to be very incredible. Hence, there are all degrees of incredible and credible, before you arrive at probability. After this, credible and probable are the same, and admit again of all degrees, 'till you arrive at moral certainty. The same thing then may be credible in all these different
degrees

without it. It is possible for a man to swim across the *Hellepont*. The possibility of this fact will make it credible upon sufficient testimony :

degrees to different persons. That the earth is round — that it is constantly spinning about like a top, and travelling with a very swift motion, while the sun and the heavens stand still — This to one part of mankind is wholly incredible, and to another morally certain. The credibility, therefore, or comparative incredibility of any fact is, for the most part, too loose a bottom to ground any argument or inference upon. The same testimony may likewise be variously credible to different persons. But the evidence of this is far more distinct, and its force more easily ascertained. The truth of testimony, where it is doubtful, may be proved many different ways: that of doubtful facts can be made clear only by testimony, which is indeed, after all, the proper proof of facts.

Experience is the general testimony of mankind to general truths. Testimony, as it is here opposed to experience, is the attestation of particular persons to particular facts; the former of these witnesses to the credibility of facts; the latter gives evidence directly to their reality or existence. From the former we collect, that *May* is on this side the line a warmer month than *December*: but the certainty of this in particular instances is only to be proved, and the contrary may be proved, from the latter. We may indeed, as I have granted, in some cases, infer from the former of these the certainty or impossibility of facts. But even here this limitation or condition is always understood — that we know the whole of the case — that no cause intervenes, which is unknown or does not appear to us. And therefore,

timony: but, if a competent reason is assigned for this hazardous enterprize (such as the escaping certain death) this will make it

fore, in the strongest cases that can be supposed, experience is no bar to the evidence of testimony; because it is very possible, in almost all cases, that such cause may intervene. Should I see a stone climb up hill, or a piece of solid iron swim in water, I could not doubt the fact, how incredible soever in itself. Suppose the same to rest upon the testimony of others: I cannot, indeed, see with the eyes of other men; but I can see that they have eyes, as well as myself: and, if their veracity is proved, as I assert it may, even to our eyes and senses (I mean, by sensible and visible facts) I have then nearly as good evidence for the fact, as if I had seen it myself. I might perhaps conclude, that the effect was produced by some invisible agent; but, whether this can be discovered or not, the fact must still be admitted. All this is unwarily allowed by the author himself, in terms as strong as can be desired: "Suppose all authors in all languages agree, that from the first of *January*, 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days: Suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people; that all travellers, who return from foreign countries, bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction: 'Tis evident, that our present philosophers, instead of doubting of that fact, ought to receive it for certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived." P. 199.

The author of the *Free Inquiry into the miraculous Powers of the primitive Church* has stated this matter in a very different

it credible upon the slightest testimony, or even probable without any.

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ferent light. He supposes, that we have the evidence of sense for the natural credibility of facts, and seems to infer, that, when we argue from hence, we go upon surer ground than when we argue from testimony, which he represents as ever dark and doubtful, and amounting only to a reasonable presumption, at best: the contrary to which, in almost every particular, is, I think, the truth. As the principles laid down by this author are very general, and may be easily misapplied, beyond his intention, in the present question, it will not be improper to compare them with what has been said. "The question concerning these miraculous powers depends," says he, "upon the joint credibility of the facts pretended to have been produced, and of the witnesses who attest them: if either part be infirm, their credit must sink in proportion, and, if the facts especially be incredible, must of course fall to the ground, because no force of testimony can alter the nature of things. The credibility of facts lies open to the trial of our reason and senses: but the credibility of witnesses depends on a variety of principles wholly concealed from us; and, tho' in many cases it may reasonably be presumed, yet in none can it certainly be known: for it is common with men, out of crafty and selfish views, to dissemble and deceive: but plain facts cannot delude us — cannot speak any other language, or give any other information, than that of truth. The testimony, therefore, of facts, as it is offered to our senses, carries with it the surest instruction in all cases, which God, in the ordinary course of his providence has thought fit to appoint for the guidance

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The result then is—that whatever is possible, or in the lowest degree credible, is capable

“ of human life *.” In answer to which, I shall not deny that the credibility of facts may in many cases be tried by our senses; but this is generally learnt from experience, or the common testimony of mankind: and, 2dly, this credibility, however learnt or proved, is no direct evidence of the reality or existence of any doubtful fact; since the fact may be highly credible, and yet never exist—may be in a great degree incredible, and yet certainly true. What the author calls *the testimony of facts offered to our senses*, is in this case only the testimony of our senses, or that of other men, to the existence, not of the fact in question, but of other facts that are supposed analogous or similar to it; which, tho’ in many cases it may amount to a very high presumption, yet is *in none a direct proof of any doubtful fact*: whereas, 3dly, testimony is a direct evidence to the existence or reality, not of similar facts, but of the fact itself: and therefore, in judging of past or distant facts, where we cannot have the evidence of our senses, the testimony of those who have this evidence is, not only the surest, but the only *method of instruction which Providence has appointed for our guidance thro’ life*. All that we *certainly know* of such facts is derived from this source. The truth of testimony is always presumed, where there are no particular reasons to suspect it. This presumption alone will give more weight, as we have seen, to a single testimony, and make it better evidence for the truth of facts, than a very high degree of presumption drawn from analogy is against it. 4thly, This presumption may be increased to any degree by the concurrence of other testimony; which

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* Preface, p. 9.

pable of a proof from testimony—that the strongest presumption from experience is of little force against positive evidence—and that, where a cause is assigned equal to any effect, the event is rendered credible upon common testimony, and sometimes probable without any.

But there are, it is granted, many cases, which we may, from nature and experience, pronounce to be impossible. It is impossible that a fact or proposition should be true, when the cause assigned is unequal to the effect. Now, the proportion of causes to effects, the natural powers of agents, and the force of moral causes on the mind, we know to a good degree, from experience. If we cannot precisely determine the force of
natural

concurrency too is itself a distinct proof of the fact attested. Lastly, the veracity of every single witness may be proved by plain and indisputable facts, as will be seen more fully hereafter. If then improbable or incredible facts require stronger evidence to support them, the weight of testimony may be increased, and the proofs that support it multiplied, infinitely; and, consequently, whatever is not absolutely impossible may be thus proved. The force of testimony cannot indeed *alter the nature of things*: but it can make things improbable become probable—it can give credibility, and even certainty, to things that were before incredible.

natural agents, we can, in most cases, assign limits which they cannot pass. For instance: We cannot precisely mark out the bounds of human power; but we can, in all cases, say to what it does not extend. If the strength of men, at a medium, be equal to one, that of king *Augustus* * or *Hercules* may be equal to two; but it cannot be equal to two hundred. A physician may restore a dying man to health; but he cannot restore a dead man to life. Of all such events, as raising the dead, calming the winds or seas, curing diseases with a word, we may fairly pronounce, that they are impossible to human strength, and therefore, when imputed to it, are incredible; because a force equal to two cannot produce an effect equal to two hundred. In this case experience decides with sufficient authority against the fact. And this, I suppose, the author mistook for an argument against miracles.

But who ever attributed these facts to human power? Those who record, and those who believe, miracles, universally ascribe them to a power superior to man. They agree, that they far exceed all human strength,

* Late King of Poland.

strength; and therefore are an argument of the concurrence and agency of some superior power. Against the interposition of such superior power, experience, as we have seen, can determine nothing. If common experience does not attest or acknowledge such interpositions, the answer is given—common occasions do not call for them. The common wants of nature are provided for by the common course of nature. Extraordinary occasions only can call for extraordinary interpositions. Of these occasions we are not the proper judges: but, that many such may arise in the government of free agents, seems obvious even to us.

If men, by a bad use of their liberty, should sink themselves into a moral incapacity of answering the ends of their creation—if they should lose sight of God and religion and all the great motives to holiness and virtue, and this evil should become general and pass all natural hopes of recovery—it is very supposable that God may interpose, by a special act of his Providence, in restoring them to a capacity of serving him, and of attaining that happiness for which they were created. If virtue, and
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that knowledge which is necessary to it, are worthy the care of Providence — and if these were in danger of perishing out of the world — why should it be thought incredible that God should send a righteous man to teach the doctrines and enforce the duties of religion, with a clear and express authority? This mission of a prophet would be miraculous: but the miracle would not appear; and therefore other miracles would be necessary to attest it's truth. Superior knowledge and virtue are not sufficient to characterize a prophet: he must do such things as no man can do, except God were with him, before his mission or character will be acknowledged for divine. Here then is a reason, which, whenever it can be pleaded, will make miracles every way credible, and as capable of proof from testimony as any matter of fact whatsoever.

In the examination of past facts, if no such end appears to have been answered by the miracles alleged, this will be a strong presumption against them. On the other hand, if any great consequences have followed — if, for instance, it should appear from history, that natural religion had, when lost, by the help of these miracles,

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been

been revived in all it's purity, and established in many nations as the will of God — this will be a strong presumption in their favour : and, if there appear no other assignable cause, which could give birth to this great event, but the miracles pretended, this will be a good proof of their reality.

We come next to consider the credibility derived to facts from testimony. This depends in general upon the principles of human nature, which we can argue with the more certainty from, because we experience them in ourselves, as well as observe them in others. We are made naturally to love truth, and to hate and abhor falsehood and deceit. The shame of being detected in a lye, and the reproach that ever follows it, is a full proof of this. Even in matters of no moment, in the most transient discourse, where men think it unnecessary to attend to what they say, were there no temptation from vanity or a desire of pleasing, they would never deviate from truth. But this principle will operate far more strongly, where men are called upon to attend, have leisure to consider, and give their testimony deliberately : it will operate more strongly
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on good men than bad — in cases of great moment than in matters of indifference.

Could we be absolutely certain, in any case, that a man had no interest, real or supposed, in deceiving — that he had no motive to deceive — we might depend with absolute certainty upon the truth of his evidence. Now, this assurance we may have from circumstances that cannot deceive us. Incapable as we are of penetrating into all the reserves and recesses of the human mind, there is yet a certain and infallible test, by which the veracity of men may in many cases be tried. For example: If the person attesting gives up every known interest for the sake of his testimony, without any known prospect of advantage — if he is exposed by it to present sufferings, and is threatened with yet greater — if he persists under all the discouragements that can be thought of, and goes through a long series of evils, which, by receding from his testimony he might prevent — and, lastly, if he gives up life itself for a painful and ignominious death — this is such a proof of sincerity as cannot be resisted. In this case, we are not only assured that the witness is free from every corrupt bias, but that he

has the highest regard for truth. Nothing but a conscious sense of this, with a hope of a future reward from the God of truth, can support men under a loss of all things, and under the actual suffering of all the evils of life. A good man may give up his interest for the sake of truth: a bad man will sacrifice truth to interest: but no man will give up interest and truth together for nothing, or for the sake of falsehood, which is worse than nothing.

The maxims we here argue from are the most certain and uncontroverted of any in morality — That men act from motives, and that good, real or apparent, is the object, the motive and aim of every action. The laws by which the moral world is governed are as certain and infallible as those of the natural. The passions, appetites, and senses of mankind act, and are acted upon, with as much uniformity as any powers and principles in nature. That men should love falsehood rather than truth — that they should chuse labour and travail, shame and misery, before pleasure, ease, and esteem — is as much a violation of the laws of nature, as it is for lead or iron to hang unsupported in the air, or for the voice of a man
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to raise the dead to life : but this, I have granted to the author, is, not miraculous, but impossible, and shall therefore have his leave, I hope, to assert, that falsehood, thus attested, is impossible — in other words, that testimony, thus tried and proved, is infallible and certain.

It remains, indeed, that witnesses the most upright and unsuspected may be mistaken in their testimony : they may be deceived themselves ; and therefore their testimony, even thus proved, is not to be securely relied on. But, happily, miracles, at least all that we dispute with this author, are of such a nature, that it is impossible to be deceived about them. Facts that are visible and palpable to the senses of mankind, that are done in open day-light, that lie open to scrutiny and observation for a long time together, present witnesses must know whether they see or not. They who report them as eye-witnesses cannot be deceived themselves in the belief of them, however they may intend to deceive others.

I conclude then, that miracles, when there appears a sufficient cause for working them, are credible in themselves — that,

when they come under the cognizance of our senses, they are proper matter of testimony, and, when attested by witnesses who have sufficient opportunities of convincing themselves, and give sufficient proof of their conviction, have a right to command our faith.

And here I accept the author's alternative, without complaining of the insidious terms in which it is expressed. "The plain consequence," says he, "is (and 'tis a general maxim worthy of our attention) that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that it's falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish: and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force which remains after deducting the inferior. — If the falsehood of any person's testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates, then, and not 'till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion *."

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By miraculous it is plain that the author here means, in the popular sense of the word, wonderful or incredible. I assert then, that miracles may be made so credible by circumstances and concurring facts, and so supported by testimony, that, if we reject them, we must believe things more incredible, or, as the author would have us speak, more miraculous than the miracles themselves.

The miracles I shall mention are those in the *Christian* Gospel — healing the sick without any visible means, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead to life, &c. all which are said to be performed by the power of God for ends the most worthy of himself, *viz.* to restore religion and morality to their true principles, and to establish the practice of them in the world. The character of those who were appointed to this work, and the doctrines which they taught, correspond perfectly with this design: great as it was, they undertook it with alacrity and confidence, declaring from the beginning that their commission was to go and teach all nations: the miracles which they attest, as giving authority to their doctrine, they assert from their own knowledge, as

what they saw with their eyes, and handled with their hands : the number of these facts, and the numbers attesting them, were very great : they concurred, without variation, in the same doctrine, and in the same testimony : they submitted, with the same courage and constancy, to the greatest persecutions and afflictions, in confirmation of their truth ; and, when called to it (as many of them were) laid down their lives for it's sake : they foresaw from the beginning the opposition they met with, and foretold, with the fullest assurance, their success against it : and the event justified their predictions ; the religion they taught was in a short time established in a great part of the world.

Here, now, the attempt itself, if not spirited and supported by truth, is wholly strange and unaccountable. That men of low birth and education should conceive a design of new-modelling the religion of all nations, and reforming their manners, by the laws of temperance, purity, and charity — that bad men should concur in an end so great and godlike, or good men in means so impious as fraud and imposture — that men of craft or address should chuse
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for the hero of their story one who was chronicled as a malefactor, and who had been put to death by the consent of a whole people — one, too, that had abused their confidence, and misled them by false hopes into an endless train of miseries — all this is contrary to nature, and therefore, by the author's rule, impossible.

The zeal with which they carried on this design, traversing seas and kingdoms, without rest, and without weariness — a zeal which could not be exceeded by the most righteous men in the most righteous cause — this, if not prompted by duty and a strong conviction of the truths they taught, is still more incredible.

The excellency of the religion they taught, in its worship and morality far surpassing all human wisdom and philosophy, and the sole end of which is to make men honest, sincere, and virtuous, if it be the work of ignorance and fraud, is equally strange and mysterious.

The success of this design is yet a greater miracle. In this chain of wonders the event is the most miraculous part. The
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establishment of the Gospel in an hundred different nations, it's victory over *Jews* and *Gentiles*, over the power and policy of the wisest and greatest people, over the pride of learning and the obstinacy of ignorance, over the prejudices of religion and those of sin and irreligion, is an event the most wonderful of any in history. But this is a miracle which we see before our eyes : it is a miraculous fact that must be ascribed to a miraculous cause. Even granting the truth of the Gospel miracles, the instruments in propagating it were so unequal to the work, that nothing but the power of God, accompanying and working with them, can account for it's success. It was still a miracle that it should prosper in their hands. But, without either truth or providence to support it, this success would be more than miraculous — it would be impossible,

The testimony directly given to these miracles is strongly confirmed by the character of the witnesses, who, as far as appears even from the testimony of their enemies, were unblameable in their lives and manners — men of conscience and religion. Their writings breathe a spirit of piety, a zeal for God and good works, that is not equalled
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by any writings in the world : they carry in them such marks of candor, truth, and simplicity, as cannot be imitated : all which can never consist with the daring impiety of usurping the most sacred of all characters, and preaching a false religion to the world.

The numbers that engaged in this design, tho' dispersed in different regions, agreed perfectly in the same report. It was in the power of any of these, or of the accomplices that must be concerned with them, to defeat the whole by discovering the fraud : and it cannot be, that not one should, by fear or interest, persuasion or torture, be prevailed on to discover it.

They put their testimony to the trial, by claiming a power of working miracles themselves : they displayed this power frequently and publickly, and so submitted their truth to the eyes and senses of all about them. This pretence, if false, must have defeated the most probable and hopeful scheme ; if true, it was no more than necessary to the difficulties of this. The event was — great numbers were every day converted to the faith. But this conduct cannot, any more than

than the event, be reconciled to the character or supposition of imposture.

Lastly, they gave the highest proof that can be given to the veracity of testimony, by going thro' the fiery trial of persecution, in all it's various forms of imprisonment, torture, and death. This began with the very beginning of Christianity. They saw it evidently before their eyes, and plainly devoted themselves from the first to a life of sufferings and affliction. They gave up ease and security, country, kindred, family, and friends, to be treated every-where with contempt and contumely, to conflict with poverty and want, to be persecuted from city to city, sentenced to imprisonment and stripes, and, at last, to die by stoning, by the sword, or the cross. But this, in support of falsehood and wrong, is so contrary to human nature, that it is absolutely incredible.

The supposition then, that the miracles of the Gospel are false, is full of wonders, prodigies, things unnatural, and which experience, the author's criterion in matters of fact, pronounces to be impossible.

And

And what now is that contrariety to nature, which is pleaded against the possibility of miracles? "A miracle," the author tells us, "may be accurately defined a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity or by the interposal of some invisible agent *." But this definition is neither accurate nor consistent with itself. The laws of nature are the laws of God: and, if God should occasionally change or invert any of these, there is no law, that I know of, against it — no law of God or nature broken by it. But, in fact, where miracles are supposed, there is no change made in these laws. I have shewn, that all that is unnatural in miracles is only appearance. There is nothing contrary to nature in supposing the dead to be raised, or the winds controlled by a power equal to the effect. It was no way contrary to the nature of God to reveal his will to mankind, in order to reform their corruptions, and to conduct them to virtue and happiness. On the contrary, this might be piously hoped for from his wisdom and goodness. It was no way contrary to the nature and condition

* P. 181.

on of men. It appears from the history of mankind, that natural religion was at this time universally corrupted, and that no other probable means were left of restoring it. Reason and philosophy had tried their strength in vain. It was, therefore, on the part of man, highly expedient and desirable. In fact, to this revelation, whether real or pretended, and to no other cause, it is owing, that the great truths of nature, concerning God, a Providence, and a future state, are now so widely spread, and that half the world, instead of dumb idols, are serving the living God: and, if all the good ends, that might be expected, are not yet answered by it, yet the seed of the word is sown, the foundations of true religion are laid, and there is hope that it will in time enlarge it's borders, and prevail, where it is received, with more effect and influence. It cannot be denied, that the Gospel is an adequate provision for the wants, a remedy for all the infirmities of mankind. There is nothing, that can be wished for in a rule of duty, that is not comprehended in it. The miracles, then, that attest it, are accounted for to our reason: we have God, the cause of all things, for their author:

thor : and a sufficient reason is assigned for the divine interposition. And this will, at the same time, account for all the wonders that followed : the actions, sufferings, and success of the Apostles will, upon this scheme, appear easy, consistent, and natural.

But, if this account be not admitted, these will remain so many contradictions to nature and experience, and it will lie upon the author to reconcile them to our belief. If the common motives to human actions, interest, passion, and prejudice, cannot be pleaded in answer to these difficulties, what other account can be given of them ? Some cause must be assigned adequate to the effect. For men to act without motives is as unnatural, as it is for a body to sink without weight — to act against the force of motives is as contrary to nature, as it is for a stone to ascend against the laws of gravity. Hear what this author says himself in another Essay : “ We cannot make use of a
 “ more convincing argument, than to prove
 “ that the actions ascribed to any person
 “ are directly contrary to the course of na-
 “ ture, and that no human motives, in
 “ such

“such circumstances, could ever induce
“him to such a conduct *.”

The author tells us, that in this case we must reject the greater miracle. But miracle is too soft a name for these inconsistencies. Could he shew, that God, or some invisible agent, had interposed in confounding the reason and understanding of all that preached or believed the Gospel, in changing their nature, and giving a contrary direction to their passions, affections, and instincts, they would then be miracles, and proper objects of our belief. But this I shall presume impossible to be proved, because no end can be assigned for such interposition, but merely to deceive mankind — an end so unworthy of God, and contrary to the perfections of his nature, that we may pronounce it impossible for him to promote, or even to permit it to take effect.

Here, then, I may call upon the author, in his own words, to lay his hand upon his heart, and declare, whether the miracles of the Gospel could possibly have been better attested, if true — whether there is any one
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condition wanting that can add credibility to them — whether there is any thing so contrary to nature in these miracles, as in the testimony given, and the belief gained, to them, if false — whether it is not easier to believe the miracles true, than that so many miraculous consequences (a natural effect of true miracles) should arise from them, if false — or, lastly, whether it be not more credible that God should work these miracles for so great an end as that of giving birth and establishment to Christianity, than that he should work more and greater miracles to confound and deceive mankind. When he has balanced his account of the impossibility of miracles with the evidence for those of the Gospel, and subtracted the former from the latter, *this subtraction will certainly amount to an entire annihilation.*

Let us now see the poor case which the author puts at last to illustrate and crown his argument, “ When any one tells me,
 “ that he saw a dead man restored to life,
 “ I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived,

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“ or

“ or that the fact he relates should really
 “ have happened : I weigh the one miracle
 “ against the other, and, according to the
 “ superiority which I discover, I pronounce
 “ my decision, and always reject the great-
 “ er miracle *.” The author’s argument
 requires him to prove, that no miracles,
 however circumstanced, can be made credi-
 ble by any testimony whatsoever. But, in
 the case supposed, the miracle has not one
 circumstance to make it credible, nor the
 testimony, one condition to confirm its
 truth. A dead man we may suppose raised
 to life without any reason, use, or end what-
 soever : and a dead man may be raised for
 some extraordinary purpose of Providence,
 as to give authority and character to the
 special messengers of God. Now, tho’ the
 former of these cannot be made credible by
 the naked testimony of one man, the latter,
 one may still suppose, may be made credi-
 ble by the attestation of many ; especially
 if they give proof, that they were neither
 deceived themselves, nor intended to deceive
 others. If one man, unassisted, cannot lift
 a weight of twenty tons, does it follow that
 twenty men cannot with the help of en-
 gines,

* P. 182.

gines, lift the weight of one? I agree with the author, that, when a man is said to rise, like the ghost in *Prince Edward**, only to set again, it is more credible, that the testimony is false, than the miracle true: but, when I see an effect worthy of Providence, in which the religion, virtue, and morality of a great part of mankind are concerned, brought about by the belief of this, or such-like miracles, and find, upon inquiry, that this miracle is attested by a great number of persons who lived and died confessors and martyrs to it, the falsehood of such testimony appears to me far more miraculous than such a miracle.

The author puts the same case, with the addition of some particulars, in the second part of his Essay: “ Suppose that all the
 “ historians who treat of *England* should
 “ agree, that, on the first of *January*, 1600,
 “ queen *Elizabeth* died — that, both before
 “ and after her death, she was seen by her
 “ physicians and the whole court, as is usual
 “ with persons of her rank — that her suc-
 “ cessor was acknowledged and proclaimed
 “ by parliament — and that, after having

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“ been

* A late play, called *Edward the Black Prince*.

“ been interred a month, she again appeared, took possession of the throne, and governed *England* three years : I must confess I should be surprized at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances, but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event *.” Here, again, the fact supposed is the strangest and most unaccountable that the author could well conceive, because no final cause appears to make it in any degree credible. But when was any such fact attested by historians ? If the author thinks the story incredible, I think it as incredible that any good historian should relate it : if he thinks it incredible, because it is a miracle, I think it incredible that God should work such a miracle for nothing.

But the importance of miracles is, it seems, with the author, a thing of no consideration : this, which we considered as a circumstance that gives the highest credibility to the Gospel miracles, is, at last, the very reason why he rejects them as incredible. “ I beg,” says he, “ that the limitation here made may be remarked, when
“ I say,

" I say, that a miracle can never be proved,
 " so as to be a foundation of a system of
 " religion ; for I own, that otherwise, there
 " may possibly be miracles, or violations of
 " the usual course of nature, of such a kind,
 " as to admit of proof from human testi-
 " mony, tho' perhaps it will be impossible
 " to find any such in all the records of
 " history *." This concession is, surely,
 very remarkable. Is it not plainly giving
 up the argument ? For, if miracles may be
 wrought in cases of less moment, why may
 they not in greater ? Or, is religion the
 last and least of all things in the opinion of
 this author ? I confess myself at a loss to
 guess what can be his intention in this place.
 If, in compromise for the other miracles
 which he here grants us unasked, he expects
 us to give up all that have religion for
 their object, it will indeed answer his pur-
 pose very well. He may grant other mira-
 cles possible, and yet make good his argu-
 ment against them. But these are not so
 easily dealt with. The surest way not to
 believe them is not to examine them. And
 this he wisely recommends as the best ex-
 pedient that has been tried against them.

E 3

" If

" If a miracle," says he, " be ascribed to
 " any new system of religion, men, in all
 " ages, have been so much imposed on by
 " ridiculous stories of that kind, that this
 " very circumstance would be a full proof
 " of a cheat, and sufficient, with all men
 " of sense, not only to make them reject
 " the fact, but even reject it without farther
 " examination *." This, indeed, is a
 short way with religion and miracles ; and
 we must own, that the author hath found
 out at last a decisive argument against
 them.

* P. 200.

PART



P A R T II.

LITTLE as it is that the author has done in the first part of his Essay, he seems to think it more than enough, and that half his pains might have been spared :
 “ In the foregoing reasoning, we have supposed, that the testimony upon which a miracle is founded may possibly amount to an entire proof, and that the falsehood of that testimony would be a kind of prodigy. But ’tis easy to shew, that we have been a great deal too liberal in our concessions, and that there never was a miraculous event, in any history, established on so full an evidence *.” But, if the author was so sure of his strength, why this *corps de reserve*, a body of troops that have been for ever harrassed, and are yet untired, in the service of infidelity ?

The first of these veteran bands is drawn up as follows : “ There is not,” says he,

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“ to

* P. 183.

“ to be found, in all history, any miracle
 “ attested by a sufficient number of men
 “ of such unquestioned good sense, educa-
 “ tion, and learning, as to secure us against
 “ all delusion in themselves — of such un-
 “ doubted integrity, as to place them be-
 “ yond all suspicion of any design to deceive
 “ others — of such credit and reputation
 “ in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great
 “ deal to lose, in case of being detected in
 “ a falsehood — and, at the same time, at-
 “ testing facts performed in such a public
 “ manner, and in so celebrated a part of
 “ of the world, as to render the detection
 “ unavoidable : all which circumstances are
 “ requisite to give us a full assurance in the
 “ testimony of men *.” The reader will
 allow me to suppose, that the author has in
 view, both here and throughout his Essay,
 the *Christian* miracles, which we have been
 considering. Now, the objections here made
 have been so frequently and fully answered
 by the advocates of Christianity, that it is
 quite piteous to see the author, after pro-
 claiming a victory, calling in such poor
 auxiliaries to his relief.

As

* P. 183.

As to the first condition here required, there never was perhaps a fact directly attested by so many witnesses as the miracles in question. We have still upon record the express depositions of many in the writings of the Apostles. The conversion of every single person to Christianity was, in truth, a clear and precise testimony to these facts; for this religion was wholly built upon them. Now, besides the twelve Apostles and seventy Disciples chosen to preach the Gospel, a great number more were converted by the miracles and resurrection of *Christ*. But those that gave this witness to the miracles of the Apostles were without number. Never was there a doctrine that spread so swiftly through the world, or that gained so many present and immediate witnesses to its truth.

The Apostles and first Disciples had not, many of them, the advantages of education and learning. But what learning is required to enable men to see with their eyes and hear with their ears? The miracles they attest were plain facts, the objects of sense. Folly itself could not be deceived in them: and sure folly could never so successfully

cessfully deceive. These men, illiterate as they were and void of art or eloquence, did what this author, with all his arguments, will never be able to do: they got the better of all the religions in the world about them, and established their own in different and distant countries. They had, therefore, we may hope, sense enough to testify what their eyes had seen and their hands had handled.

They had not perhaps any great reputation to lose. But the good name of a poor man is as dear to him as that of the greatest. If they had no publick character to lose, they had publick infamy to dread: and this they incurred, not by being detected in a falsehood, but by persevering in the truth. If it was little that they gave up to follow *Christ*, it was, however, all that they had. And what they gained was a negative quantity, and must be put to the side of their losses: they gained hunger and thirst, toil and labour, watchings and fastings, scorn and reproach, scourgings and death. They lost, then, enough to evidence their sincerity. They gave every proof, that ever was given by man, to the truth of their testimony.

As

As to the notoriety of the facts, they were done in the most publick manner — in places of constant resort — many of them in *Jerusalem*, at times of the greatest concourse: and, what is more, they were done in direct opposition to the prejudices of all that saw them — before the most vigilant and powerful enemies, who did not, as this author tells us wise men commonly do, “think the matter too inconsiderable to “deserve their attention *,” but exerted their utmost industry and authority in suppressing this new religion; putting its head and leader to death, suborning false witnesses to discredit him and his miracles, and proceeding immediately, by imprisoning some, and killing others, to deter and disperse his followers. These miracles, therefore, were wrought in the very place where their detection was most certain and unavoidable; and the testimony given to them was given in the same publick manner and in the same place.

The author is well aware, that the testimony of the Apostles and first Christians,
if

* P. 198.

if the miracles were false (I mean, the fact of giving such testimony) and the miraculous events that followed in consequence of them, will be thought, upon reflection, at least as incredible as the miracles themselves: and therefore, to abate our wonder on this head, he observes, “ secondly, that
 “ there is a principle in human nature,
 “ which, if strictly examined, will be found
 “ to diminish extremely the assurance we
 “ might have from human testimony in
 “ any kind of prodigy. The maxim, by
 “ which we commonly conduct ourselves
 “ in our reasonings, is, that the objects of
 “ which we have no experience resemble
 “ those of which we have — that what we
 “ have found to be most usual is always
 “ most probable. But tho’, in proceeding
 “ by this rule, we readily reject any fact
 “ that is unusual or incredible in an ordinary degree, yet, in advancing farther,
 “ the mind observes not always the same
 “ rule; but when any thing is affirmed
 “ utterly absurd and miraculous, it rather
 “ the more readily admits such a fact upon
 “ account of that very circumstance which
 “ ought to destroy all it’s authority. The
 “ passion of surprize and wonder arising
 “ from miracles, being an agreeable emotion
 “ tion

“tion, gives a sensible tendency towards
 “the belief of those events from which it
 “is derived *.”

The love of novelty is, indeed, a natural passion; it is no other than the love of knowledge, which God hath implanted in the mind for the wisest reasons: and for the same reasons we may be assured that he hath not laid snares to betray us into error, and much less hath placed in us a principle, as the author here supposes, the tendency of which is to make us believe things, merely because they are incredible. “With
 “what greediness,” saith he, “are the
 “miraculous accounts of travellers received,
 “their descriptions of sea and land mon-
 “sters, their relations of wonderful adven-
 “tures, strange men, and uncouth man-
 “ners!” It is true that every new discovery gratifies our love of knowledge, and gives pleasure to the mind: but it must have the appearance of truth to do so. Tho’ we love to be informed, we do not love to be deceived. A single miracle would risk the credit of the best-esteemed travels. But, according to this author’s principle, the
 voyage

voyage to *Lilliput* or *Laputa* must meet with more credit than that of *Anson* or *Ellis*.

But, if the love of novelty will not reconcile us to miracles, that of religion will make us believe any thing. "If the spirit of religion joins itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense *." If the author means, that men are more apt to believe miracles in the cause of religion than in any other case, he is so far in the right. Where should men expect or believe miraculous interpositions, but where it is most worthy of God to interpose? But it does not follow, that religion is a friend to false miracles, or an enemy to common sense. On the contrary, right notions of the divine nature and perfections, which religion teaches, are a necessary help to distinguish true miracles from false. Now, the *Jews*, in general, were better instructed in these points than the wisest of the Heathens. The men of *Athens* were far more superstitious than the most ignorant of the *Hebrews*. The false wonders of magick, witchcraft, and necromancy, these were taught by their law to hold in contempt

* P. 185.

tempt, and, consequently, were less liable to be practised upon by appearances of this sort. And, of the Apostles and first Christians, it is certain, that they had all the security against delusion and error of this kind, that a rational piety and the noblest sentiments of God and a Providence could give them.

But “ a religionist may be an enthusiast,
 “ and imagine he sees what has no reality :
 “ he may know his narration to be false,
 “ and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the world, for the sake of
 “ promoting so holy a cause: or, even
 “ where this delusion has no place, vanity,
 “ excited by so strong a temptation, operates on him more powerfully than on
 “ the rest of mankind in any other circumstances, and self-interest with equal force :
 “ his auditors may not have, and commonly have not, sufficient judgment to canvas
 “ his evidence ; what judgment they have
 “ they renounce upon principle in these
 “ sublime and mysterious subjects *.” Here, it is confessed, the author has touched upon a very powerful and fruitful source of error.

Men

Men, whose passions are stronger than their reason, will be guilty of excess in religion as well as in other things. A zeal for opinions frequently makes men conclude their own cause to be the cause of God ; and, from wishing that Heaven may declare in their favour, they are easily led to believe such interpositions upon the slightest testimony. But, tho' this principle will make men believe false miracles, it will not overpower their senses, or make them see what has no reality. The *French* prophets were extravagant enough to expect that one of their principal teachers would come to life again ; but, with all their enthusiasm, none could believe that he saw this miracle : on the contrary, this disappointment opened their eyes, and the pretence to miracle ruined their cause. Nor can I allow, with the author, that men of the best intentions can propagate a known falsehood for the sake of truth. An honest man may be hasty in believing ; but he cannot be a deceiver or impostor. It is certain, the religion of *Christ* disdains such pious frauds, and his Apostles have forbid and condemned them in terms as severe as language can express : nor is it a principle in this religion, as this writer would insinuate, that men should renounce their
their

their judgment in inquiries of this sort : on the contrary, they are enjoined carefully to examine the truth of miracles and doctrines, before they believe them.

But, granting the author's principles in their full extent, the miracles of the Gospel will be no way affected by them : For, first, the Apostles are free from all tincture and appearance of enthusiasm ; witness the writings which they have left behind them, and that system of doctrines and morals contained in them : in their piety nothing over passionate, rapturous, or ecstatic appears, but all is rational, sober, and temperate : their zeal for their master and his religion, never transports them into complaints or invectives against his enemies or their own, or into any strained eulogiums or panegyrics upon his character : they recite all that is wonderful in his actions, without exclamation, without vehement asseveration, with an undoubting, unguarded simplicity, that is highly singular and remarkable : their whole conduct, in like manner, was void of ostentation, steady, uniform, and regular throughout : they were not only consistent each with himself (which a fanatick spirit seldom is) but all

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pursued

pursued the same plan, without varying or change, with the most perfect harmony and agreement. And, secondly, whatever influence, from passion or prejudice, the witnesses to Christianity were under, this operated the contrary way, and must dispose them to reject, rather than receive, the miracles : the Apostles themselves were *Jews*, and zealous of the traditions and customs of their ancestors : the other converts, whether *Jews* or Pagans, were prejudiced, as strongly as they could be, by religion, against the Gospel : bigotry and enthusiasm rose up every-where in persecution against it ; nothing but reason and conviction could induce men to declare for it : every passion, every interest, and every prejudice persuaded against this belief : and, in fact, every single conversion to it was not barely the testimony of an unprejudiced judge, but the testimony of an enemy to it's truth.

“ The wise,” says the author, in another place, “ lend a very academick faith to every report which favours the passion of the reporter, whether it magnifies his country, his family, or himself, or in any other way strikes in with his natural inclinations and propensities. But what greater
“ temp-

"temptation than to appear a missionary,
 "a prophet, an ambassador from heaven?
 "Who would not encounter many dangers
 "and difficulties to attain so sublime a
 "character*?" Where this character is
 indeed attended with honour and respect, it
 will be natural for ambitious men to desire
 it. But the head and leader of this sect had
 been every-where reviled and persecuted,
 and was crucified as a malefactor: his fol-
 lowers every where shared the same fate.
 What temptation was there to appear his
 prophet or ambassador? What vanity or
 self-interest was gratified by it?

But thirdly, the author tells us, "it
 "forms a very strong presumption against
 "all supernatural and miraculous relations,
 "that they are always found chiefly to
 "abound amongst ignorant and barbarous
 "nations; or, if a civilized people has ever
 "given admission to any of them, that peo-
 "ple will be found to have received them
 "from ignorant and barbarous ancestors,
 "who transmitted them with that inviola-
 "ble sanction and authority which always
 "attends ancient and received opinions†."

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* P. 196.

† P. 186.

This argument, we presume, has been already answered. The miracles of the Gospel were, as we have said, performed where they were most suspected. The *Jews* were by no means a barbarous people, and they were freer from superstition than any other nation in the world. These miracles were immediately canvassed with all the severity that the prejudice of enemies could suggest. Some who were healed of their diseases were sent immediately to the priests, on purpose, as it seems, that they might undergo the strictest inquisition. Others were called before the council, examined, and threatened, and every means tried to refute and silence them. This religion did not get strength in the dark, and then adventure itself by degrees into the light: it was openly proclaimed, from the first, in the temple, and in the synagogue, where the *Jews* always resorted: and, when the Apostles had filled *Jerusalem* and *Judæa* with their doctrines, *Rome* and *Athens* were some of the next scenes of their ministry.

Under this head we are entertained with a long story from the *Pseudomantis* of *Lucian*. "It was," saith the author, "a wise policy in that cunning impostor, *Alexander*,
"der,

“ *der*, who, tho’ now forgotten, was once
 “ so famous, to lay the first scene of his
 “ impostures in *Paphlagonia*, where, as *Lu-*
 “ *cian* tells us, the people were extremely
 “ ignorant and stupid, and ready to swal-
 “ low even the grossest delusion. People at
 “ a distance, who are weak enough to think
 “ the matter at all worth inquiry, have no
 “ opportunity of receiving better informa-
 “ tion. The stories come magnified to them
 “ by an hundred circumstances. Fools are
 “ industrious to propagate the delusion ;
 “ while the wise and learned are contented,
 “ in general, to deride it’s absurdity, with-
 “ out informing themselves of the particu-
 “ lar facts, by which it may be distinctly
 “ refuted. And thus the impostor above-
 “ mentioned was enabled to proceed, from
 “ his ignorant *Paphlagonians*, to the inlist-
 “ ing votaries even among the *Grecian* phi-
 “ losophers and men of the most eminent
 “ rank and distinction in *Rome* — nay,
 “ could engage the attention of that sage
 “ emperor, *Marcus Aurelius*, so far as to
 “ make him trust the success of a military
 “ expedition to his delusive prophecies *.”
 But what, if this famous impostor never
 pretended to miracles ? It is said, indeed,

F 3

that

* P. 188.

that he had his emissaries in distant countries, who reported this, among other things, to his honour : but there is no appearance in his history of his ever counterfeiting or pretending to this power. It was his policy not to hazard his reputation on so dangerous an issue. Ignorant and stupid as his *Papblagonians* were, it might have been too much for all his art to impose false facts upon their eyes and senses. He had, by a bold and successful cheat of another kind, established his character among this people, who, *Lucian* tells us, differed from brutes in nothing but their outward form. He had the fortune too to gain the ear of a famous *Roman* general, who, by the same author's account, was formed to be the dupe of every pretender. This seems to have got him some name in *Rome*. But I find none, that deserved to be called philosophers, among his votaries. It is certain, that the sight of a *Christian* or an *Epicurean* disconcerted all his management. They were always drove from his presence, having the confidence, no doubt, to deride the prophet and his oracles. Every one must believe, upon the representation here made, that the emperor *Antonine* had undertaken the expedition mentioned at the
infi-

instigation of this impostor, or, at least, had concerted measures with him for pursuing it. But the oracle given out by this pretended prophet was voluntary and unasked, in order, if the event had happened, as was probable, to increase his own credit. And, superstitious as this great emperor and philosopher was, he did nothing, in pursuance of it, but what the wisest general might have done to humour the superstition and folly of his soldiers, and to inspire them with a confidence of victory. It no-where appears that he hazarded the least point, or altered any one of his measures, in consequence of it. But, if it were true that this impudent impostor had this learned emperor and the schools of *Greece* among his admirers, this would only prove how much the wisest part of mankind were enslaved by superstition, before Christianity released them from it.

The author adds, as a fourth reason which diminishes the authority of prodigies,
 “ that there is no testimony for any, even
 “ those which have not been expressly de-
 “ tected, that is not opposed by an infinite
 “ number of witnesses; so that not only
 “ the miracle destroys the credit of the tes-

"timony, but even the testimony destroys
 "itself. To make this the better under-
 "stood, let us consider, that, in matters of
 "religion, whatever is different is contrary,
 "and that 'tis impossible the religions of
 "antient *Rome*, of *Turky*, of *Siam*, and of
 "*China* should, all of them, be established
 "on any solid foundation. Every miracle,
 "therefore, pretended to have been wrought
 "in any of these religions (and all of them
 "abound in miracles) as it's direct scope is
 "to establish the particular system to which
 "it is attributed, so it has the same force,
 "tho' more indirectly, to overthrow every
 "other system: in destroying a rival-sys-
 "tem, it likewise destroys the credit of
 "those miracles on which that system was
 "established: so that all the prodigies of
 "different religions are to be regarded as
 "contrary facts, and the evidence of these
 "prodigies, whether weak or strong, as
 "opposite to each other*." This argu-
 ment, he is apprehensive, will appear too
 subtle and refined: but the only fault of it
 is, that it has no foundation in truth. The
 author cannot name a single miracle, that
 was ever offered as a test of any of these
 religions, before their establishment, or to
 autho-

authorize any pretended prophet to teach such religion. *Mabomet* expressly disclaims this power in many places of his *Koran*. It appears from his manner of speaking of it, that he knew what advantage this pretence would give to his cause, and even felt the want of it: yet, with all the assistance that art and power could give him, he durst not hazard so dangerous an experiment. There is a wide difference betwixt establishing false miracles, by the help of a false religion, and establishing a false religion by the help of false miracles. Nothing is more easy than the former of these, or more difficult than the latter. The author would make us believe that miracles are to be met with in almost every page of antient history: "When
 " we peruse the first histories of all nations,
 " we are apt to imagine ourselves transport-
 " ed into some new world, where the whole
 " frame of nature is disjointed, and every
 " element performs it's operations in a dif-
 " ferent manner from what it does at pre-
 " sent. Battles, revolutions, pestilences,
 " famines, and deaths, are never the effects
 " of those natural causes which we experi-
 " ence*." But the truth is, they are very
 thinly sown in the writings of the heathens.

Portents

Portents and prodigies I call not by that name. These are to be accounted for from natural causes, or owe their existence to a frightened or disturbed imagination. Of miracles, properly speaking, there are very few upon record: most of these are given up, by the historians who relate them, as vulgar fables, unworthy of belief, and none are so attested as to make them in any degree credible. Of this the author has undesignedly given us a full proof in the story which immediately follows:

“ One of the best-attested miracles in all
 “ profane history is that which *Tacitus* re-
 “ ports of *Vespasian*, who cured a blind man
 “ in *Alexandria* by means of his spittle, and
 “ a lame man by the mere touch of his foot,
 “ in obedience to a vision of the god *Sera-*
 “ *pis*, who had enjoined them to have re-
 “ course to the emperor for these miracu-
 “ lous and extraordinary cures *.” This,
 the author seems to insinuate, is as well at-
 tested as any *Christian* miracle, and may be
 made as good an argument for the religion
 of the antient *Egyptians* as any miracle for
 any religion whatsoever: “ Every circum-
 “ stance,” says he “ adds weight to the tes-
 “ timony,

"timony, and might be displayed at large
 "with all the force of argument and elo-
 "quence, if any one were now concerned
 "to enforce the evidence of that exploded
 "and idolatrous superstition." The occasi-
 on being so tempting, he has tried his hand,
 and shewn us how far this miracle may be
 paralleled with those of the Gospel: "The
 "gravity, solidity, age, and probity of so
 "great an emperor, who, thro' the whole
 "course of his life, conversed in a familiar
 "way with his friends and courtiers, and
 "never affected those extraordinary airs of
 "divinity assumed by *Alexander* and *Deme-*
 "*trius* — The historian a cotemporary wri-
 "ter, noted for candor and veracity, and,
 "withal, the greatest and most penetra-
 "ting genius, perhaps, of all antiquity,
 "and so free from any tendency to supersti-
 "tion and credulity, that he even lies un-
 "der the contrary imputation of atheism
 "and profaneness — The persons, from
 "whose testimony he related the miracle,
 "of established character for judgment and
 "veracity (as we may well suppose) eye-
 "witnesses of the fact, and confirming
 "their verdict, after the *Flavian* family
 "were despoiled of the empire, and could
 "no longer give any reward, as the price
 "of

“ of a lye : *Utrumque, qui interfuere, nunc*
 “ *quoque memorant, postquam nullum mendacis*
 “ *pretium.* To which if we add the publick
 “ nature of the fact, as related, it will ap-
 “ pear, that no evidence can well be supposed
 “ stronger for so gross and so palpable a
 “ falsehood.” As to the character of this
 wise emperor, *Suetonius*, who has wrote his
 life, tells us, that he had long before this
 conceived hopes of the empire, from certain
 idle dreams and omens, of which he has
 reckoned up eight or ten, as ridiculous as
 any in history : that immediately before this,
 when he was now proclaimed emperor by
 some of the legions, and had strengthened
 himself by several alliances, he condescend-
 ed, notwithstanding his probity and gravity,
 to give out a miracle upon his own autho-
 rity, to make himself considerable in the
 eyes of the people ; pretending that, in the
 temple of *Serapis*, where he went alone, *de*
firmitate imperii auspiciū facturus, one *Ba-*
filides, who was known at the time to be
 far distant and unable to travel, had ap-
 peared to him, offering him crowns and
 garlands — a certain omen (as he and his
 courtiers interpreted the word *Basilides*) of
 the royal dignity. As for the credit of the
 historian, he was no witness of the fact,
 nor,

nor, for ought we know, ever conversed with those that saw it; and the testimony he gives to it does by no means amount to a proof that he believed it himself. To what purpose, then, is the character he gives us of his veracity, penetrating genius, and incredulous turn of mind? But, if the testimony of the historian be not admitted, the witnesses, from whose testimony he related it, were of established character for veracity and judgment. This, indeed, is to the purpose. On this point the whole merits of the cause must rest. How, then, is this proved to us? Why, the author says *it may well be supposed*, and the historian tells us that they persisted in the report, when they could gain nothing by the fraud. But how does it appear that they had never received any reward for their verdict? The emperor, tho' he affected not the airs of divinity, yet was well pleased with his new title, and, no doubt, was well understood to look with a favourable eye on those who contributed to support it. The good uses to which this miracle served are honestly told us both by *Suetonius* and *Tacitus*: *Auctoritas, et quasi majestas quædam, ut scilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principi deerat, hæc quoque accessit, Suet. Miracula evenere, queis celestis*

celestis favor et quædam in Vespasianum inclinatio ruminum ostenderetur, Tacit. The *Alexandrians* could not but have an interest in gaining the favour of this prince: the persons cured are said to be *è plebe Alexandrinâ*, probably unknown to these witnesses and to all the *Romans* about *Vespasian*: the partisans of the new emperor were prepared to welcome and improve every thing that looked in his favour: the physicians, who were consulted whether these disorders were curable, declared that they were: where, then, is the wonder that two men should be instructed to act the part of lame and blind, when they were sure of succeeding in the fraud, and of being well rewarded (*as we may well suppose*) for their pains.

This story is followed by two others, as remarkable proofs of the credulity of mankind, which, having obtained in *Christian* countries, may perhaps be thought more apposite to the author's purpose of discrediting the *Christian miracles*. "There is
 "also," saith he, "a very memorable story
 "related by cardinal *de Retz*, and which
 "may well deserve our consideration: when
 "that intriguing politician fled into *Spain*,
 "to avoid the persecution of his enemies,
 "he

“ he passed thro’ *Saragoſſa*, the capital of
 “ *Arragon*, where he was ſhewn, in the ca-
 “ thedral church, a man who had ſerved
 “ twenty years as a door-keeper of the
 “ church, and was well known to every body
 “ in town who had ever paid their devotions
 “ at that cathedral : he had been ſeen for ſo
 “ long a time wanting a leg, but recovered
 “ that limb by the rubbing of holy oyl upon
 “ the ſtump ; and, when the cardinal exa-
 “ mined it, he found it to be a true natural
 “ leg, like the other. This miracle was
 “ vouched by all the canons of the church ;
 “ and the whole company of the town was
 “ appealed to for a confirmation of the fact,
 “ whom the cardinal found, by their zea-
 “ lous devotion, to be thorough believers
 “ of the miracle. Here the relater was alſo
 “ cotemporary with the ſuppoſed prodigy,
 “ of an incredulous and libertine character,
 “ as well as of great genius — the miracle
 “ of ſo ſingular a nature as could ſcarce
 “ admit of a counterfeit — and the wit-
 “ neſſes very numerous, and all of them,
 “ in a manner, ſpectators of the fact of
 “ which they gave their testimony : and
 “ what adds mightily to the force of the
 “ evidence, and may double our ſurpriſe on
 “ this occaſion, is, that the cardinal him-
 “ ſelf,

“ self, who relates the story, seems not to give any credit to it, and, consequently, cannot be suspected of any concurrence in the holy fraud *.” The story is, indeed, remarkable, as the author has told it. First, the relator was *a cardinal, and a man of great genius*; and, tho’ he had never seen the wooden leg, yet he satisfied himself that the man had now *two natural legs, like another man*. It does not, indeed, appear, that he examined all or any of the canons, or that he discoursed with any body in town about it: but he found, *by the devotion of the people*, that they believed the man to have had a wooden leg. Then the cardinal was a man of a libertine character, *and, which is still more wonderful, and adds mightily to the evidence, he did not believe the story himself*. This climax of evidence and wonder still rising upon us is very extraordinary. The relator of the story was a *cardinal*, and therefore a good evidence of a *Romish* miracle: he was of *a libertine character*, and therefore had the better right to be believed; but, what puts the evidence out of question, *he did not believe the story himself*; which, again, is *doubly surprizing*, as the author observes, because he was naturally of an *incredulous*

credulous temper. This is the first story. The second deserves a more serious attention.

“ There, surely, never was so great a
 “ number of miracles ascribed to one per-
 “ son, as those which were lately said to
 “ have been wrought in *France* upon the
 “ tomb of *Abbé Pâris*, the famous *Janse-*
 “ *nist*, with whose sanctity the people were
 “ so long deluded. The curing of the sick,
 “ giving hearing to the deaf and sight to
 “ the blind, were every-where talked of as
 “ the usual effects of that holy sepulchre.
 “ But, what is more extraordinary, many
 “ of the miracles were immediately proved,
 “ upon the spot, before judges of unques-
 “ tioned integrity, attested by witnesses of
 “ credit and distinction, in a learned age,
 “ and on the most eminent theatre that is
 “ now in the world. Nor is this all: a
 “ relation of them was published and dis-
 “ persed every-where: nor were the *Jesuits*,
 “ tho’ a learned body, supported by the ci-
 “ vil magistrate, and determined enemies to
 “ those opinions in whose favour the mira-
 “ cles were said to have been wrought, ever
 “ able distinctly to refute or detect them.
 “ Where shall we find such a number of

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“ cir-

“ circumstances agreeing to the corroboration of one fact ? And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events which they relate ? And this, surely, in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation *.”

The author has here asserted many things that he will not be able to support. The miracles pretended were, many of them, refuted upon the spot : a judicial inquest was made by the archbishop of *Paris* into one of the most celebrated, and the cheat was fully detected : the lieutenant of the police brought many to confess that the part they had acted was all artifice and pretence ; and an ordonnance was hereupon issued from the court for apprehending all that were concerned in such frauds : the archbishop of *Sens* exhibited a public charge against more than twenty, as palpable and discovered cheats : and Mr. *Montgeron*, the professed advocate of these miracles, of whom we shall have more to say hereafter, does not, in his answer, pretend to defend a fourth
part

part of these : and the author may see his defence of these, and of all the other miracles he defends, *distinctly refuted* in the *Critique générale* of Mr. *Des Vœux*. The most usual effects of this sepulchre were not cures, but distempers— a sort of convulsions, which seized alike the sound and the sick, and were attended with such strange appearances as brought great contempt and ridicule upon the other miracles of this saint. These convulsions, we are told by skilful physicians, are easily counterfeited, and, from being counterfeited, frequently become real and habitual : they are too so communicable, by a sort of sympathy, to persons of weak nerves, that this distemper, it is well known, is for this reason excluded some of our great hospitals ; it having been found that, when one is seized, it spreads, like infection, thro' a whole ward. This will account for the great numbers who are said to have felt this extraordinary effect from visiting the *Abbé's* tomb.

I deny not that there were real cures wrought upon the sick that were brought there : but the same, I dare pronounce, would happen, if a thousand people, taken

at a venture, were at any time removed from their sick chambers in *London* to *St. Paul's Church-yard* or the *Park*, especially, if they went with any strong hope of a cure: in such a number, some are always upon the point of recovery — many only want to fancy themselves well — others may be flattered for a time into this belief, while they are ill — and many more, by fresh air and motion, and especially by forbearing the use of other means, will find a change for the better: but, that the blind received their sight, or the deaf were restored to hearing, by these visits, I deny that we have any competent or tolerable evidence. This sanguine writer does, indeed, take upon him to answer for *the credit of the witnesses* and the *integrity of the judges*. But these miracles were never proved in a judicial way. The vouchers produced for them are only certificates collected from all sorts of persons, who were neither interrogated by judge or council, nor confronted by other witnesses: they only left their depositions or affidavits in the hands of a notary, who was not concerned to examine, or even to know, the persons who made them, or whether they gave in their own or ficti-

fictitious names. The credit, therefore, of the witnesses was never proved by any trial whatsoever *.

G 3

Doctor

* In the second edition of the *Metaphysical Essays* there is an additional note to p. 195, &c. in which the author observes, that "the *Molinist* party had tried to discredit these "miracles in one instance, that of Mademoiselle *Le Franc*. "But, besides that their proceedings were the most irregular in the world, particularly in citing only a few of the "*Jansenists*' witnesses, whom they tampered with: besides "this, I say, they soon found themselves overwhelmed by "a cloud of new witnesses, one hundred and twenty in "number, most of them persons of credit and substance in "*Paris*, who gave oath (*— for what ? not for the miracle*, "*in question, but*) for the miracles."

The pretended cure of *Anne le Franc* was the most celebrated and best-attested of all the first miracles of this saint; and was, therefore, very fitly pitched upon for examination, in order to give all the advantage to the miracles that could be wished, and to put the trial of them upon the fairest issue. It was tried by a judicial process directed for that purpose; and, whatever formalities the author may think wanting in the proceedings, it was so clearly convicted of imposture, that one of the ablest advocates for these miracles, M. *le Gros*, could find nothing to reply in its defence; nor does M. *de Montgeron* himself pretend to defend it. It was proved, by five of the witnesses to this miracle, that the certificates, which they had given into the hands of the notary, and which were countersigned by Mademoiselle *le Franc* herself, were afterwards falsified, and many material circumstances added which they had never attested: by others,

Doctor *Middleton*, who has likewise set out the evidence of these miracles with great parade, is pleased to tell us that “ the reality

thers, that she was, in great measure, recovered before she visited the tomb ; and that many of the disorders alleged as cured were entirely chimerical : and by others, that she returned from the tomb in the same condition that she went there, and still wanted the help of farther medicines : which last circumstance may seem confirmed by the non appearance of *le Franc* herself, who was not to be found at the trial.

The author goes on, after celebrating the vigilance, activity, penetration, and extensive intelligence of *Monf. Hé-
raut*, then *lieutenant de police*, to observe, that “ this magistrate, who by the nature of his office is almost absolute, “ was invested with full powers, on purpose to suppress or “ discredit these miracles ; and he frequently seized immediately and examined the witnesses and subjects of them ; “ but never could reach any thing satisfactory against them.” But the nature of this magistrate’s office was so far from making him absolute in the present case, that it gave him no power at all to examine the truth of these miracles. This was the province of the archbishop alone, and not to be invaded : accordingly, in the ordonnance of the king, dated *January 27. 1732*, by which *Mr. Héraut* was empowered to arrest and confine the most obstinate of these miraculized cheats, after the conviction of *Anne le Franc*, and after he had brought many to a voluntary confession of the fraud, this power is particularly reserved to the archbishop.

Soon

"lity of them is attested by some of the
 "principal physicians and surgeons in
 "France, as well as the clergy of the first
 "dignity, several of whom were eye-wit-
 "nesses of them, who presented a verbal
 "process of each to the archbishop with a
 "petition, signed by above twenty curés or
 "rectors of the parishes of *Paris*, desiring
 "that they might be authentically register-
 "ed, and solemnly published to the people,
 "as true miracles *." Any one, who reads
 this in connection with what goes before it,
 will be led to believe that a great number
 of these miracles had been confirmed by

G 4

this

Soon after this the tomb was inclosed and shut up; but
 the same farce still continued in many parts of the city,
 some hundreds pretending to these miraculous convulsions;
 most of them poor girls, who got a livelihood by the busi-
 ness. So that the author might have spared his remark,
 "No *Jansenist* was ever embarrassed to account for the ces-
 "sation of the miracles when the church-yard was shut up.
 "'Twas the touch of the tomb that operated these extra-
 "ordinary effects; and when no one could approach the
 "tomb, no effects could be expected, &c." As he might
 too his concern for the poor *Molinists* that rejected these
 miracles; who were never put, as he represents, to the
 hard necessity of accounting for them from witchcraft and
 the power of the devil, but always resolved them into their
 proper causes.

* *Free Inquiry*, p. 225.

this verbal process * : but there never were, as far as I can inform myself, more than four or five thus proved by order of the cardinal *Noailles*. Whether the petition mentioned was presented by physicians and clergy of the first dignity, as the doctor's words seem to import, I will not take upon me to controvert : but, in all that I have read, I find only that it was presented by the twenty-two curés who signed it †. The doctor

* The verbal process I take to be a narrative of the fact drawn up on the spot by a magistrate (in the present case, by a commissary appointed for that purpose) upon a view of the place and circumstances, an examination of the parties, and the deposition of witnesses.

† Mr. *Hume*, in the additional note to page 196, speaking of Mr. *de Ventimille*, who was successor to cardinal *Noailles* in the archbishoprick of *Paris*, tells us, that twenty-two rectors or curés of that city, whose general character, for strictness of life and manners, he celebrates very justly, but very little to the purpose, did, “ with infinite earnestness, press him to examine these miracles, which they assert to be known to the whole world, and indisputably certain : but he wisely forbore.” But it is certain, that this prelate was so far from forbearing or declining this task, that he caused a publick judicial inquest to be made into them ; and, in an ordonnance of *November 8, 1735*, has published the most convincing proofs, that the miracles, so strongly warranted by these curés, were forged and counterfeited.

doctor might have told us too that it was rejected as well as presented, and the archbishop's reasons for rejecting it, which were nothing less than palpable falsehoods and contradictions, legally proved *par des informations juridiques*, on the witnesses, and even in the depositions taken by order of the cardinal *de Noailles*: he might have told us that thirty of the most eminent *Jansenist* doctors, who were supposed to have an interest in supporting these miracles, protested against the abuse that was made of them, and published many good reasons for not believing them—that, if some physicians of note pronounced the cures in question to be miraculous, many more, who had better opportunities of informing themselves, judged the contrary—that one of the faculty published a treatise to account for the phenomenon of the convulsions in a natural way, and several, who were consulted on the other pretended cures, declared the whole to be fiction and imposture*.

All

* See letter 7th of the *Critique* of Mr. *Des Vaux*. This judicious writer, who is now minister of the *French* church in *Dublin*, was himself a *Jansenist* and an inhabitant of *Paris* at the time when these miracles were celebrated. This circumstance, which adds to the credit of his verdict,
doctor

All that was real in these phænomena may be accounted for from nature: but a great part was certainly appearance, and owing to art. The *Abbé Paris*, as doctor *Middleton* has told us, “ was a zealous *Jansenist*, and a warm opposer of the bull or “ constitution *Unigenitus*, by which the doctrines of this sect were expressly condemned: he died in 1725, and was buried in the churchyard of St. *Medard* in *Paris*, whither the great reputation of his sanctity drew many people to visit his tomb, and pay their devotions to him as a saint; and this concourse, gradually increasing, made him soon be considered as a subject proper to revive the credit of that party, now utterly depressed by the power of the *Jesuits*, supported by the
“ authority

doctor *Middleton*, who had seen his book, and therefore must know it, chuses to conceal, and to represent him only as a *Protestant writer*. This may be excused. But it is too much to assert that “ he does not deny the facts, but only “ endeavours to make the miraculous nature of them suspected:” for near a fourth part of this book, which consists of nine letters, in two volumes, 12mo, is taken up in disproving these facts, and the title at the head of one of the longest letters is *Ou l'on fait voir, par les pièces même que Mr. de Montgeron produit, que les faits qu'il publie ne sont pas vrais.*

“ authority of the court *.” Half the city of *Paris*, and many among them of rank, took part with the appellants against this bull. The saint was, therefore, sure to have justice done him. Most of these, if they did not believe, yet wished well to his miracles, for the sake of mortifying the *Jesuits* and their party.

“ But the evidence of these miracles is still
 “ preserved in a pompous volume of *Monf.*
 “ *de Montgeron*, a person of eminent rank
 “ in *Paris*, who, *Dr. Middleton* tells us,
 “ dedicated and presented it to the king in
 “ person, being induced, as the author de-
 “ clares, by the incontestable evidence of
 “ the facts, by which he himself from a
 “ libertine and professed Deist, became a
 “ sincere convert to the *Christian* faith †.”
 As the credit of these boasted miracles rests almost wholly on this book of *Mr. Montgeron*, the reader will not be displeased, if we stop a little to consider the character of the work and its author.

This book was published, as we are advertised at the beginning, to demonstrate,
 among

* *Free Inquiry*, p. 223.

† *Free Inquiry*, p. 224.

among other things, the justice of the cause of the appellants against the bull *Unigenitus*: but it was so far from answering the purpose of reviving the credit of the *Jansenists* or their miracles, that from this time they sunk into greater disgrace than ever; while the author was cashiered from his employment, sent first to the *Bastille*, and afterwards into banishment. The author declares himself converted to Christianity by the evidence of these facts: but it is strange to observe, from his own history of this conversion, that it was wrought without his either seeing or examining the evidence of any one of these miracles. It appears, from this history, that the author was early impressed with a sense of religion—that, having given himself up to a life of pleasure and debauch, he was, on a certain occasion, so struck with remorse, as to shut himself up in a convent, with design to spend his days in penitence and retirement—that, returning again to his former life, he endeavoured to free himself from the checks of conscience by reading the books of Deists, and persuading himself that religion was a cheat—that the famous bull *Unigenitus*, which just then appeared, helped much to confirm him in this belief: But the fears of religion still kept hold of him,

him, and, particularly, on the first report of our *Abbé's* miracles, his conscience took the alarm, and put him upon inquiring in earnest into the truth of religion—that, upon hearing a second time of these miracles, he resolved to visit the tomb, and make a strict enquiry into their truth—that, coming there, he was immediately struck with the ardor that appeared in the devotion of the people; strongly impressed with which, he fell himself on his knees, and addressed a short prayer to the saint, beseeching him, “ That, if indeed he still lived, and had any power with the Almighty, he would pity his blindness, and intercede for him, that his mind might be enlightened, and the cloud removed which held him in darkness!” Upon which, immediately, while he continued some hours on his knees, all the arguments for religion, which he had ever heard or read, presented themselves to his mind, and passed in review before him, with such force and conviction, that he became from that moment a zealous and confirmed Christian. Here, you see, the author, without waiting for any miracle, or inquiring into those which he had heard, was not only converted to Christianity, but became a determined believer of all the miracles

racles of this saint. And from this short sketch we may easily make out his character, which was plainly that of a wrong-headed and violent man, that could think coolly about nothing, changing, as fancy or temper led him, from one opinion, from one extreme, to another, and governed throughout by passion or prejudice, and not by reason.

His book was published ten (or according to Dr. Middleton, twelve) years after the *Abbe's* death; and 'tis a collection of only nine cures, selected out of the great number which are said to have been wrought in all this time; the first of which I shall present my reader with, in a few words, as a specimen of the rest: A *Spanish* youth, at the age of ten years, lost entirely the sight of the left eye by a violent rheum and inflammation: a few years after, receiving a blow upon the right eye, he became almost blind for some days, but, by proper remedies, recovered his sight again: at the age of sixteen, this eye was attacked with a fluxion and inflammation like to that which had destroyed the other, but was soon recovered, by the application of a certain water, so far as to allow him for two or three months after to prosecute

prosecute his studies: but, the disorder then returning, and the same remedy being found ineffectual, he continued in this state, without the application of any remedy, near two months; at the end of which, hearing of the *Abbé Pâris's* miracles, he resolved, with the consent of his governors, who were zealous *Jansenists*, to apply to the *Abbé's* tomb: he entered upon a neuvaine, or nine-days devotion, in honour of the saint, and to supplicate his assistance: the effect was, that his pains redoubled, and the inflammation increased; but towards the end of the term these bad symptoms abated, and his eye at last became strong enough to bear the light, and to permit him to return to his studies: and all this without the use of any other means than saving the eye from reading for three months, shutting out the light, and bathing it the two last days with a little decoction of mallow-roots with laudanum, prescribed by an oculist; and this too owed all it's virtue to the manner of applying it, which was not with a common linen rag, but a piece of the shirt in which the *Abbé* died, and some of the earth in which he was buried. A certain *Jansenist* physician, who saw this eye two days before the cure, judging it to be a disorder of the optick nerve,

expressed

expressed some doubt whether it were curable, and, being told afterwards that no human means had been used, inclined to think the cure miraculous. This, I suppose, is one of the principal physicians, who, Dr. *Middleton* tells us, attested the truth of these miracles. But it is certain that many other physicians and oculists, both in *France* and *Spain*, thought otherwise, and prescribed bleeding, bathing, and the use of different medicines for it. The left eye, in the mean time, remained in it's former state, uncured; and the eye which was healed relapsed some time after, and was again cured by bleeding. This is the first miracle, as it is related by this author, and attested by many vouchers and certificates printed along with it—a story too contemptible for argument or remark. But, if the reader desires to see the false colouring in which the writer has dressed it, and the inconsistencies and prevarication of the witnesses detected, he may find this done, to his entire satisfaction, in the letters above-mentioned, and in the nineteenth and twentieth tomes of the *Bibliothèque raisonnée*; from which, and Mr. *Vernet's Traité de la Vérité de la Religion Chrétienne*, most of these remarks are taken.

The

The evidence then, for these miracles, tho' set out with so much eloquent pomp, when examined, is found to amount to very little. But this is acknowledged, that the credulity of mankind is very fully proved by this and the other legendary miracles of Popery, and that hence an argument of seeming weight still lies against the miracles of the Gospel: for, if so many other miracles have been believed rashly and without reason, it is possible that these may likewise have been received upon incompetent testimony: and, if this be possible, must it not also be allowed more probable, than that events so strange and contrary to the common course of nature should be true? This is the inference, we may presume, the author would have us make from the stories he hath related; and this objection he has incidentally dropped in several parts of his Essay: "The
 " many instances of forged miracles,
 " and prophecies, and supernatural events,
 " which, in all ages, have either been detected by contrary evidence, or which detect themselves by their absurdity, mark
 " sufficiently the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and the mar-

“vellous, and ought reasonably to beget
 “a suspicion against all relations of this
 “kind * :” And again, in the place above
 cited, “Should a miracle be ascribed to
 “any new system of religion, men in all
 “ages have been so much imposed on
 “by ridiculous stories of that kind, that
 “this very circumstance would be suffici-
 “ent, with all men of sense, not only to
 “make them reject the fact, but even re-
 “ject it without farther examination †.”
 As this is one of the most specious and
 prevailing arguments against the miracles
 of religion, it will deserve a distinct an-
 swer.

To the first consequence, then, which the
 author here draws from the credulity of men,
 I readily agree — That miracles and facts
 of an extraordinary nature may be justly
 suspected, 'till sufficient evidence of their
 reality is produced, and ought never to be
 received, 'till after a previous examination
 had into this evidence. But, that all mi-
 racles should be rejected without examina-
 tion, because a great number have been
 forged, is, sure, a most illogical conclusion.
 The

* P. 186.

† P. 200.

The truth of the Gospel miracles does not imply that all the miracles upon record are true: how then does the falsehood of other miracles affect the truth of these? If some men are cheats and impostors, is there no truth in the world? If some have believed upon too slight evidence, must we, therefore, reject all testimony, and disbelieve or doubt about every thing? Is the currency of bad coin a proof that there is none good? The test and assay will always distinguish the true from the false: and it is our own fault, if we are imposed upon by counterfeits. God hath given us reason and understanding to know good and evil, truth and falsehood, and in all things pertaining to life or duty, hath made the difference between them sufficiently clear and discernible. If he speaks to us by miracles, he will, doubtless, cause his voice to be known, and give full evidence of his authority. To those, who are not present witnesses of his power, this evidence will be transmitted with such testimony as cannot be impeached — such as will stand every fair and equitable trial. With such testimony, we assert, the Scripture miracles are delivered down to us. Let them be brought to the trial, and, if they are found want-

ing, be rejected; but not be condemned, as this supercilious writer would have them, unheard.

I observe, that this author, in common with many others, seems to think every proof of the credulity of mankind a sort of argument against the evidence of the Gospel: they think this sufficient to account for the belief of all miracles, and that it is, therefore, needless and folly to look for any evidence in their favour: "When such reports fly about, the solution of the phenomenon is obvious; and we judge in conformity to experience and observation, when we account for it by the known principles of credulity and delusion. And shall we, rather than have recourse to so natural a solution, allow of a miraculous violation of the most known and most established laws of nature *?" But I must deny that there is any such cause or principle in human nature as credulity. If some are more credulous than others — if the same person be more credulous in some points than others — this depends upon other principles: it is

is a natural effect, and always to be accounted for from natural causes. Interest, when it is opposed by truth, will bias the mind to error: ignorance and indolence will dispose men, the one of necessity, the other of choice, to follow the judgment of others, and to believe as the world about them does: a deference to authority, whether publick or private — a prejudice to opinions in which we have been educated, or which we have long entertained — has the like effect: where men are, as is frequent, divided into parties by opinion, this prejudice will be heightened by pride and resentment; they will hearken greedily to every thing that favours their system, and be obstinately deaf to every thing that opposes it. These are principles in human nature of great force and extent; and, where they induce to the belief of any thing, there we may suspect credulity, and that men will be prepared to believe, without evidence, even things the most difficult of belief. If, in these circumstances, it happens, that not the fact itself, but the miraculous nature of it only, is the point that gratifies our wishes, there, the greater the miracle is, the greater are these corrupt reasons for believing it, and, the more strange and

Incredible it is, the more easily sometimes will it obtain belief: as a stone, the heavier it is, and the more unapt to motion, will descend the swifter, if the plane be sufficiently inclined, upon which it moves.

But, on the other hand, where these or such-like principles have no influence, truth will be fairly heard, and the faith of men will be generally proportioned to the evidence that appears: and, where men believe and maintain opinions contrary to the influence of these principles, it is a fair presumption that their faith is well grounded, and that their assent is extorted by the force of truth. The principles, therefore, of credulity will by no means account for all belief alike. Tho' a stone will descend by it's own weight, it does not follow that it can move itself upon even ground; and, if it be seen, contrary to it's natural gravity, to ascend a steep acclivity, we are sure that there must be some competent power to impell it. Where miracles are wished for or wanted, the strangest and most unsupported may be believed: but, in other circumstances, the miraculous nature of the fact will hang as a weight upon it, and retard it's progress; and, if it make it's way,

in opposition to the wishes, passions, and prejudices of mankind, there must be truth and evidence to support it.

I have already asserted that it required a stronger faith and more credulity to believe the evidence of the Gospel false, than to believe the miracles true. All the principles that can make men credulous conspired to make the first Christians disbelieve the Gospel. It was not, therefore, credulity, but conviction, which wrought this belief in them. But these principles very naturally account for the miracles of the *Romish* church. Interest, authority, and all the powers of enthusiasm, superstition, and prejudice, forward the belief of these: the power of the church is supported by them, and the countenance of the church, in the opinion of the believer, gives certainty and infallibility to them.

The disparity, then, betwixt these and the Gospel miracles is infinite. The end for which the Scripture miracles were wrought is the greatest that can be thought of, and the testimony by which they are supported is confirmed by the surest test of truth. If miracles, therefore, are in any case credi-

ble, they are in this ; if testimony is in any case to be relied on, it is in this. But what are the ends proposed or answered by the miracles of Popery ? More offerings are, perhaps, brought to the shrine at *Loretto*, more gain is made of the relicks of the saints. But are any nations brought to the faith, or is any single infidel converted, by them ? Then, the testimony which vouches them is implicitly received, and the veracity of the witnesses confirmed by no proof or trial. There is no one condition here to make miracles credible — no one circumstance to credit the evidence that supports them. There is, therefore, no consequence to be drawn from these to the miracles of the Gospel.

And the same observation will hold, tho' not with equal force, of the miracles recorded in the church before the times of Popery : there were not the same antecedent reasons for working them, nor the same great consequences attending them : and when were any called, at the hazard of their fortunes and lives, to attest them ? We are not, therefore, to be alarmed, if the truth of these miracles is sometimes brought in question, or even if many of them should
be

be proved to be false ; since the miracles of *Christ* and his Apostles are no way affected by this, and the Gospel wants no miracles, but it's own, to support it : nor, indeed, can we do a greater injury to the cause of Christianity, than to parallel these, even supposing them true, with the canonical miracles of Scripture ; since, tho' both may be equally true, yet the evidence upon which we receive them, and, consequently, the reasons for believing them, are not equal, but the one, in it's weight and force, infinitely transcends the other. Nor is it any reproach to Christianity, or any just cause of offence to pious Christians, if the fathers of the church, men justly celebrated for their piety and virtue, and even for their learning and abilities, are found to have given too easy credit to these miracles. Learning and piety are no security against errors of this kind. On the contrary, men of this character, as they are often less practised in the arts of men, and less apt to suspect design and fraud in others, may lie more open to be deceived. Men may be prejudiced, even by piety and virtue, to such opinions as are thought favourable to piety and virtue, and, where any thing is thought of good tendency, may think it good to believe

lieve it. A little acquaintance with history will teach us, if our own observation does not, that men of great abilities and of the most upright intentions may be hasty in believing and zealous in supporting the belief of fables, especially where the cause of virtue or religion is supposed to be promoted by them.

We may, therefore, retain our veneration for the piety and good works of these eminent lights of the church, without believing every thing that they believed : we may believe many of the facts which they have recorded to be false, without hurting Christianity, or in the least impairing the evidence of the Gospel,

I might, under this head, have observed that false miracles are almost a natural consequence of true, and, therefore their prevalence and reception is rather a presumption of the existence of true miracles than an argument against them. Could we foresee that a series of miracles would be wrought in any country, and a publick worship and religion be established in consequence of it, we might presume that miracles would be there more frequently pretended and counterfeited

terfeited than in any other place. True miracles, like true money, will give a currency to false; and the authority and character, which they give to those that work them, will excite the crafty and ambitious to imitate them. On the other hand, where no prior miracles are acknowledged, there is less temptation to counterfeit this power, and more difficulty of succeeding in it. In fact, the false pretences of miracles among Christians are no more than might be expected, in consequence of the truth and certainty of the first miracles of Christianity; and, if the number of these has been far greater in the *Christian* world than elsewhere, it is an argument that there, if anywhere, true miracles have been wrought. The reader will be pleased to see this argument in the words of Dr. *Middleton*:

“ The innumerable forgeries of this sort,
 “ which have been imposed upon mankind
 “ in all ages, are so far from weakening
 “ the credibility of the *Jewish* and *Christian*
 “ miracles, that they strengthen it: for how
 “ could we account for a practice so uni-
 “ versal, of forging miracles for the support
 “ of false religions, if on some occasions
 “ they had not actually been wrought for
 “ the confirmation of a true one? or, how
 “ is

“ is it possible that so many spurious copies
 “ should pass upon the world, without some
 “ genuine original from which they were
 “ drawn, whose known existence and tried
 “ success might give an appearance of pro-
 “ bability to the counterfeit? Now, of all
 “ the miracles of antiquity, there are none
 “ that can pretend to the character of ori-
 “ ginals, but those of the Old and New
 “ Testament, which, though the oldest by
 “ far of all others of which any monuments
 “ now remain in the world, have yet main-
 “ tained their credit to this day, through
 “ the perpetual opposition and scrutiny of
 “ ages; whilst all the rival productions of
 “ fraud and craft have long ago been suc-
 “ cessively exploded, and sunk into utter
 “ contempt — an event that cannot reason-
 “ ably be ascribed to any other cause, but
 “ to the natural force and effect of truth,
 “ which, tho’ defaced for a time by the
 “ wit, or depressed by the power, of man,
 “ is sure still to triumph in the end over all
 “ the false mimicry of art and the vain
 “ efforts of human policy *.”

The remainder of this Essay is little more
 than a rude insult on the Scriptures and
 the

* Prefatory Discourse to a Letter from *Rome*, p. 88.

the *Christian* religion. For fear his readers should mistake his meaning, and not apply his argument where he intended, the author proceeds, with a smiling grimace, to tell us, "that our most holy religion is
 "founded on faith, not on reason; and
 "'tis a sure method of exposing it, to put
 "it to such a trial as it is by no means
 "fitted to endure." This he pretends to make evident by examining the miracles related in the Pentateuch: "Here," says he,
 "we are to consider a book presented to us
 "by a barbarous and ignorant people,
 "wrote in an age when they were still more
 "barbarous, and, in all probability, long
 "after the facts it relates, corroborated by
 "no concurring testimony, and resembling
 "those fabulous accounts which every nation gives of its origin. Upon reading
 "this book we find it full of prodigies and
 "miracles: it gives an account of a state
 "of the world and of human nature entirely different from the present — of our
 "fall from that state — of the age of man
 "extended to near a thousand years — of
 "the destruction of the world by a deluge — of the arbitrary choice of one
 "people as the favourites of heaven, and
 "that people the countrymen of the author
 "thor

“thor — of their deliverance from bondage
 “by prodigies the most astonishing imagi-
 “nable: I desire any one to lay his hand
 “upon his heart, and, after serious confi-
 “deration, declare, whether he thinks that
 “the falsehood of such a book, supported
 “by such a testimony, would be more ex-
 “traordinary and miraculous than all the
 “miracles it relates; which is, however,
 “necessary to make it be received, accord-
 “ing to the measures of probability above
 “established *.”

If the *Jews* were thus more than barbarous
 at the time when these books were wrote,
 whence, without a miracle, could they learn
 all the great truths relating to the being
 and attributes of God, which the most
 learned part of the world were for many
 ages after in total ignorance about?
 Whence could the religion and laws of
 this people so far exceed those of the wisest
 Heathen, and come out at once, in their
 first infancy, thus perfect and entire; when
 all human systems are found to grow up by
 degrees, and to ripen, after many improve-
 ments, into perfection? The *Jews* had
 but

but little commerce with other nations, and, therefore, did not excel in the literary and other arts of *Greece*: but the same Scriptures, which prove that they were earlier in possession of the most useful and sublime parts of knowledge, secured them likewise from ever sinking into that barbarity which the author charges upon them. Let any one compare the book of *Genesis*, which he treats with so much freedom, and which is by many centuries the oldest book in the world, with any of the earliest heathen historians — let him compare the psalms of *David* with the hymns of *Callimachus* or *Orpheus* — let him read the history of *Josephus*, who was just cotemporary with *Christ* and his Apostles — and he will incline to judge more favourably of this people.

The great events recorded in this history have no connection with the argument of miracles, and, therefore, do not belong to this place. But these are corroborated by the strongest concurring testimony that can be desired to facts that are, most of them, older than the use of letters itself. The traditions of every country seem all to point to one and the same original. The late invention

vention of arts and sciences, the foundation of cities and empires, the manner of peopling the world, and the number of it's present inhabitants, seem all to prove that the world had it's beginning no earlier than the period assigned by *Moses*, and agree perfectly with the account of the deluge. There are no monuments of antiquity which give room to suspect the world of earlier original. The first authors of *Greece* and *Egypt* speak of the chaos, of the abyss of waters that covered the earth, of man's being formed out of the ground, and of his first innocence. From these, one of the *Latin* poets has described the creation, the state of innocence, the gradual corruption of mankind, and the deluge, in a manner very nearly resembling that of *Moses*. The memory of a general flood, which destroyed the whole race of men and animals, except one family, seems to have been preserved for some ages among almost all nations. *Lucian* tells us, the tradition among both the *Greeks* and *Syrians* was, that this was a judgment from heaven on the wickedness of mankind : he describes the manner of the flood, the ark in which some of every kind were preserved, and many other particulars, just as we have them in the book of *Genesis*.

Plutarch,

Plutarch, alluding to the same tradition, mentions the ark, and even the dove that was sent forth to see if the waters were abated. A great number of antient authors, who mention the deluge, and give witness to the building of *Babel*, the burning of *Sodom*, and many other great events in the *Mosaic* history, are reckoned up by *Josephus*, *Grotius*, and others. The present surface of the earth, the shells of fish that are found in midland countries, and even on the tops of mountains, and the remains of land-animals at very great depths in the earth, are still surviving monuments of the deluge *. It is almost certain that the

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world

* An universal deluge will, I suppose, be allowed one of the most miraculous facts in the history of the Old Testament. The difficulties that on all sides surround it are as great as can easily be conceived. And hence many *Christian* writers (among whom is the learned *Mr. Wollaſton*) have thought it sufficient to believe that this flood was topical, confined to a small part of *Asia*; and that the genius of the language in which the relation is delivered, and the manner of writing history in it, will account for all the rest. But, the more we improve in natural knowledge, the more reasons we see for believing this history in the literal and largest sense. One of the latest and ablest writers upon this subject confirms what the best natural historians have observed — that the shells of fish are found in great quantities in all parts of the world — that the *Lapides Judaici*, which are gathered on the top of mount *Carmel*, are evidently the remains

world began to be peopled about the plains of *Babylon* and near where the ark is said to have rested. From the east colonies of men were sent westward : and from thence we can trace pretty distinctly the progress of arts and sciences. The long lives of the first men are spoken of by all the Heathens.

This

mains of a sea-animal — that the *Alps* and *Pyrenean* mountains abound with others — and that there is not a mountain in the world, in which there have been tolerable opportunities of enquiring, where remains of sea-animals have not been found : he tells us, that many of those which are found in great abundance in our island are natives of other seas — that the horns of *Indian* deer are found in great clusters, and always at considerable depths, in many parts of *England*, and sometimes under a stratum of sea-shells : and hence, though writing upon another question, he concludes, “ it is equally certain, that, wherever they are found, water must have at one time overflowed, since there is no other possible means of their being brought there ; and, since they are found in every part of the earth, the tops of the highest mountains not excepted, that overflowing of water must have been universal.” *Hill's Remarks on Phil. Transf.* p. 53. Here, then, we have one of the most disputable parts of the Bible-history confirmed and proved by indisputable fact and experiment. In the mean time, it must be observed that the miracles upon which the *Christian* and *Jewish* religions were built have an evidence of their own, distinct from that of the other parts of this history ; and that, tho' it were allowed that many errors may have crept into the historical parts of this book, yet the truth of these religions, and the faith of those miracles upon which they are built, would remain unshaken.

This fact is so far from discrediting the *Mosaic* history, that Monsieur *Pascal* reckons it a full proof of the fidelity of the author: "This historian," says he, "has brought the deluge, and even the creation, so near his own time, by means of the few generations which he counts between them, that the memory of them could not but be still fresh and lively in the minds of all the *Jewish* nation." In the line of tradition there are but five steps betwixt *Moses* and the first man. "Therefore, the creation and the deluge are indubitably true. This argument," says he, "must be acknowledged for conclusive by those who apprehend it's process *." The longevity of men in the first ages seems necessary for the better peopling the world, the invention and improvement of arts, and for propagating religious and all useful knowledge, when they depended wholly on tradition. And I am persuaded that this author cannot even invent a more probable or rational account of peopling the world than this which he affects to deride.

The other insinuations, which he has thrown out to discredit these books, have been so often refuted, that it is tedious to

* *Pascal's Thoughts*, p. 86.

go over them again. The authority of an historian is not, sure, the worse for his being the countryman of those whose history he writes. The character of *Moses* is remarkably free from all partiality to himself and his countrymen : he faithfully records all the obstinacy and perverse behaviour of the latter, and frequently reproaches them with it in the severest terms : he spares not his own failings, or those of his nearest friends, and omits many things, which are recorded by others, to his honour : the future government of the *Israelites* he left not to his own tribe, but to that of *Judah*, and, in the appointment of his immediate successor, had no regard to his own family, but left them undistinguished and mixed with the common *Levites*.

As to the arbitrary preference of this people, a distinction in religious privileges is perfectly agreeable to the analogy of God's dispensations to mankind, both natural and moral. But the *Jewish* dispensation ought not to be considered apart, but in connection with the *Christian*, in which it ended. These are but different parts of one and the same scheme, which naturally illustrate and confirm each other's authority. " And, " from this view of them," says Dr. Middleton,

dleton, “ we see the weakness of that objection commonly made to the *Mosaic* part, “ on the account of it’s being calculated for “ the use only of a peculiar people ; whereas, in truth, it was the beginning of an “ universal system, which, from the time “ of *Moses*, was gradually manifested to the “ world by the successive missions of the “ Prophets, ’till that fulness of time, or “ coming of the *Messiah*, when life and immortality were brought to light by the “ Gospel, or the chief good and happiness “ of man perfectly revealed to him *.”

The origin of this people is so far from resembling the fabulous accounts of other nations, that it is quite singular, and in all respects different from any other. They are a numerous people, sprung from the loins of one man, and have continued unmixed with the rest of the world, if we reckon from the time of *Abraham*, when they were first marked out by the promise of God to his posterity, near 4000 years — a great part of the age of the world, and approaching very near to the time when it was last peopled by the posterity of *Noah*. Their very existence at this time, taken with all it’s

circumstances, is a miracle, which gives credit to all the miracles of *Moses*.

The books, which record these miracles, were certainly written soon after the facts ; since the religion, laws, and polity of the *Jews* were wholly built upon them. These books are the great charter by which they were incorporated into a nation. These miracles are the only sanction which gives authority to the laws they contain. The miracles were wrought in the face of all *Israel*, and many of them under observation for a long time together. The books, that record them, were of publick authority and daily resort. It was, therefore, impossible, if false, that they should obtain credit for a day. The very being of these laws is a proof of the miracles connected with them ; since the latter, if false, must have discovered the falsehood of the former. By appealing to these facts, it was put in the power of every one to see through, or, rather, it was put out of their power not to see through, the imposture. The memory of these facts was not only preserved in these records, but they were written, if I may so speak, and recorded in the daily customs and religious ceremonies of the *Jews*. The *Passover* was instituted in memory of their coming out of *Egypt*
— the

— the feast of *Pentecost* in token of the law being given upon mount *Sinai* fifty days after — that of *Tabernacles* in remembrance of their encamping in the desert — and, in the form of dedicating or offering their first-fruits, a solemn commemoration was enjoined of the signs and wonders by which they were delivered out of *Egypt*. The belief, therefore, of the miracles must of necessity be as antient as their religion; and indeed, without these, their religion, government, and even their present existence, as a people, would be more miraculous than all the miracles recorded in the *Pentateuch*.

We are now come to the conclusion of this celebrated Essay: “ Upon the whole,” says he, “ we may conclude, that the *Christian* religion not only was at first attended “ with miracles, but even at this day cannot “ be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to “ convince us of it’s veracity: and whoever “ is moved by faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own “ person, which subverts all the principles “ of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience *.”

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The author in one of his Essays, complains of a want of politeness and civility in those who defend religion against the attacks of the Free-thinkers, "whose moderation" and good manners," he tells us, "are very conspicuous, when compared with the furious zeal and scurrility of their adversaries *." But who can, without some impatience, see a religion which he holds sacred, and which hath established itself purely by reason and argument, treated with this open scorn and abuse? Has this author lived in the time of Sir *Isaac Newton*, Mr. *Locke*, and Mr. *Addison*? Can he know that these men gloried in the name of Christians, that the first of them employed many of his best hours in studying and illustrating the Scriptures, and that the other two have wrote professedly in the defence of this religion, and yet think himself at liberty to treat all that believe it as men that are incapable of reasoning or thinking? The charge, which he has here brought against the advocates of Christianity, is so far from being true, that I dare rest the whole merits of the controversy upon this issue. Let any one read the authors he mentions, *Collins* and *Tindal*, with *Morgan*, *Gordon*, and the latter writers in this cause, and compare them

* *Essays moral and political*, p. 62.

them with their antagonists, *Chandler*, *Conybeare*, *Leland*, *Foster*, and judge on which side the temper and moderation lies. And yet, if men claim some authority to opinions which have the publick voice on their side, where is the wonder or the blame? It is nothing unnatural for men thus supported to assume a confidence, and to expect some deference and modesty from their adversaries. But, when men oppose established opinions with an air of authority, and decide against the publick—when they profess to doubt, and yet dictate, about every thing, and act at once the Sceptick and the Dogmatist—this is a character, which, however it may be accounted for, can never be excused *. And I here ask my reader, whether

* The author tells us, that, “in all controversies, those who oppose the established and popular opinions affect a most extraordinary gentleness and moderation, in order to soften, as much as possible, any prejudices that may lie against them.” But the fact is notoriously otherwise. In establishments of every kind, the party which forms the opposition, if they have the liberty to speak out, is usually the most furious and loud in invective. The reason is, the most furious and vehement spirits are the most impatient of control, and the most forward to oppose. A man that is a tyrant in his own temper is sure to complain of tyranny in his superiors; and a proud man will always think you proud, if you differ from him, whatever authority and whatever modesty

* *Essays moral and political*, p. 62.

whether he has any-where met with either a more sceptical, disputatious turn of mind, or a more imperious, dogmatical style, than in the writings of this author? It is remarkable

modestly you may have on your side. Thus the celebrated author of the *Patriot King* pronounces the most candid of all writers to be a *presumptuous Dogmatist* for daring to differ from his opinion, even before it was known. This consummate writer, not content to shine in his own sphere, assumes the nod, and will give the law in metaphysics as well as politics. "I would not say," says he, "that God governs by a rule that we know or may know as well as he, and upon our knowledge of which he appeals to men for the justice of his proceedings towards them, which a famous divine has impiously advanced in a pretended demonstration of his being and attributes: God forbid!" I learn from hence, that the famous divine spoken of has the misfortune to have fallen under the displeasure of this author, and that he has a sovereign contempt for all that do so. But, what his offence is, I am still at a loss to conjecture. I think myself certain, that he has no-where said what the author charges him with, "that we know or may know the rule by which God governs as well as he." He has indeed, said, "that God himself, tho' he has no superior, from whose will to receive any law of his actions, yet disdains not to observe the rule of equity and goodness as the law of all his actions in the government of the world, and condescends to appeal even to men for the righteousness and equity of his judgments (as in *Ezek. xviii*); that (not barely his infinite power, but) the rules of this eternal law are the true foundation and the measure of his dominion over his creatures*." But what is this more than

* *Patriot King*, p. 94.

* Demonstration of the being and attributes, &c, 9th edit. p. 218.

markable with what ease and alacrity he hath asserted the fact before us. But this cavalier manner is familiar to him. He tells us, in another essay, "that the Quakers are
 " perhaps

than the author himself has said, in terms as free, in the very page that is stained with this censure? "That God is
 " not an arbitrary, but a limited monarch, limited by the
 " rule which infinite wisdom prescribes to infinite power—
 " that he does always that which is fittest to be done—and
 " that this fitness, of which no created power is a competent judge, results from the various natures and the more
 " various relations of things." He adds, "So that, as
 " creator of all systems by which those natures and relations
 " are constituted, he prescribed to himself the rule which
 " he follows as governor of every system of being." This, though no candid reader will complain of it, is more crude and perplexed than any thing I remember in the author here arraigned. God does always what is right and fit. But right and fit were not made what they are, when this or any other system of beings was made. The fitness of every action, the same circumstances supposed, was always and ever will be the same. This rule is eternal and immutable as truth itself, and it's authority is as universal, extending to all beings and to all possible systems of beings; as the author we are speaking of has, with equal modesty and clearness, asserted and proved immediately before the passage here cited. If he has said, farther, that God appeals to men for the justice of his proceedings, he has given his authority for this—an authority which a *Christian* divine must think decisive. And what doth this amount to more than saying that God hath implanted in men a sense of what is just, merciful, and good; and that all his dispensations are agreeable to our ideas of justice, mercy, and goodness? Does
 not

“ perhaps the only regular body of Deists
 “ in the universe:” And again, “ that the
 “ leading whigs have always been either
 “ Deists

not the astronomer try the works of God by the laws of mechanism and geometry, when he pronounces that they are done in number, weight, and measure? And must we not have some measure of justice, mercy, and goodness, when we attribute these to the deity? To say that we can see the wisdom of God in his works is not saying that we are as wise as God himself: nor does our seeing the fitness and equity of his proceedings in some instances imply that we are competent judges of or can see the reason of his proceedings in all. As the author has not pointed out the passages in the writer he excepts against, I can only guess this to be the place. But, if he has any-where dropped an expression that may seem less accurate or proper upon this subject, the author might have pardoned it, who confesses, in the same page, that he cannot express himself on this subject properly, and that, when our ideas are inadequate, our expression must needs be improper. To return: We have here a phenomenon, which, to those who have not studied human nature, will appear altogether singular: Lord B——e complaining of the impiety, pride, and presumption of Dr. Clarke. Established opinions and an established character provoke his resentment: rather than submit to another, he will contradict himself. And this, I take it, is the principle from which most of Mr. Hume's philosophy is derived; to whose extraordinary gentleness and modesty that of this writer (to speak in the curious phrase of the latter) * is but as the positive degree to the superlative.

*Est genus hominum, qui esse primos se omnium rerum volunt,
 Nec sunt.*

* Patriot King, p. 142.

“ Deists or professed Latitudinarians in their principles, that is,” says he, “ friends to toleration, and indifferent to any particular sect of Christians *.” Now, it is certain that the Quakers profess the belief of Christianity as universally as any sect whatsoever. And what right has the author to charge a whole body of men with such flagrant insincerity? As to the Whigs, the principles of toleration are certainly Christian principles, and do by no means imply an indifference to any sect, much less a coldness to religion in general: and, if the best Christians are usually the best subjects and citizens (which I think an indisputable truth) I should hope their principles would be no impediment to their faith. I am sure, however, they have no reason to thank this author for his compliment.

They who believe religion must think that the cause of virtue and the happiness of mankind are bound up in it: and this will justify a degree of zeal and ardor in its defence. But what is there to call for or excuse this spirit in those who oppose it? If the author be a friend to virtue, which, from his elegance of mind and taste, I scarce can doubt — if he be a friend to natural religion, which a
person

* *Essays moral and political*, p. 111.

person of so much thought and reflection sure must be—what principles has he in reserve for the support of these, when Christianity is taken away? The best philosophy, as I have already said, availed but little in reforming the religions or morals of mankind: and, as to the philosophy of this author, it is, as far as I understand it, as ill calculated for this purpose as any I have met with*. But, indeed, religion can never be supported, or virtue taught, with any force or effect, by the reasonings of philosophers. The world will never be governed by metaphysical ideas of honour and beauty, decency of action, and the fitness of things. It is the author's own observation, that “an
 “ abstracted, invisible object, like that which
 “ natural religion alone presents to us, cannot long actuate the mind, or be of any
 “ moment in life. To render the passion
 “ of continuance, we must find some method of affecting the senses and imagination
 “ tion

* The character of this author's philosophical writings, which I should not otherwise have attempted, may be given in his own words, where he speaks of the *Acyphron* and other works of the ingenious and good Bishop Berkeley: “ They admit of no answer, and produce no conviction: “ their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement “ and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of “ Scepticism.” *Essays moral and political*, p. 240.

" tion, and must embrace some historical
 " as well as philosophical accounts of the
 " Divinity. Popular superstitions," says he,
 " and observances are even found to be of
 " use in this particular *." The great thing
 to be wished, then, for the interest of virtue
 and the good of mankind, is, that the max-
 ims of natural religion should be fixed and
 assured by an authority that is decisive—
 that a rule of duty should be taught as the
 will and law of God—that the sanctions of
 this law, a future state and a judgment to
 come, should be known alike to all, both
 small and great—that the hopes of pardon
 should be assured to the penitent sinner—
 that there should be an institution to propa-
 gate this knowledge, and to spread it thro'
 the world—that there should be a publick
 worship set up, and a discipline and œcono-
 nomy prescribed, to train men to piety and
 virtue: but all this, and much more to the
 advantage of virtue, we have in the Chris-
 tian religion. Can the author tell us where
 else they are to be found? If he is look-
 ing out a cure for superstition, I venture to
 assure him, that, with all his researches
 into metaphysics and morals, he will never
 find any equal to that religion which he en-
 deavours to explode; which in a few years
 did

* *Essays moral and politica*l, p. 236.

did infinitely more towards freeing the world from the fear and folly of prodigies, omens, dreams, and oracles, than all the philosophy in the world had done in many ages. If, unhappily, this religion is still corrupted by superstitious mixtures, these I freely commit to the mercy of the author. But Christianity is not to answer for these any more than for the other errors and vices of mankind, which however it aims to correct, it does not pretend to eradicate. And even these will be better and more successfully opposed by fair argument and civility than with insult and reproach. Where a liberty of debate and free enquiry is allowed, it is unpardonable to insult the publick that allows it. "There is a degree of
 "doubt and caution and modesty, which
 "in all kinds of scrutiny and decision,
 "ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner *."

* *Philosophical Essays*, p. 250.

F I N I S.

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